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Tomasz Labuk

GLUTTONS, DRUNKARDS AND LECHERS. THE DISCOURSES OF FOOD IN 12TH-
CENTURY BYZANTINE LITERATURE: ANCIENT THEMES AND BYZANTINE
INNOVATIONS

Praca doktorska napisana pod kierunkiem
Prof. dr. hab. Przemysława Marciniaka

Katowice 2019

In loving memory of my Mom.

*... nunc tamen interea haec, prisco quae more parentum
tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias,
accipe ... multum manantia fletu
atque in perpetuum ... ave atque vale.*

(Catullus, 101)

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is a trivial yet undeniable fact that food intake is one of the most essential needs of every living creature. From the simplest unicellular structures, to the most complex organisms, it is a *sine qua non* condition of life and existence. Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs is probably the most exact illustration of this banal truth.¹ Researching motivational drives and personal development of humans, Maslow created a theoretical model which sought to explain people's behavioral patterns. It is represented in the form of a pyramid, where the physiological needs, including the triad of hunger, thirst and sexual lust (among others), are placed at its bottom, while the drive of self-actualization forms its pinnacle. According to the model, the higher needs can be satisfied if and only if the most basic ones are fulfilled. Once these essential urges are deficient, the complete realization of human potential is simply impossible.

Certainly, there exists an extremely thin line between necessity and luxury. Satisfaction of one's hunger can easily lead to gluttony, quenching one's thirst might result in overdrinking, while subjecting oneself to lust may be followed by uncontrolled lasciviousness. Those who focus only on satisfying their fundamental bodily needs remain at the very bottom of Maslow's pyramid, unable to reach its higher levels. This dialectic of sheer necessity and unwanted excess is one of the most curious paradoxes of human condition. Mark Forsythe has recently argued that as a species we have evolved to be attracted to the smell of alcohol:

We evolved to drink. Ten million years ago our ancestors came down from the trees. Why they did this is not entirely clear, but it may well be that they were after the lovely overripe fruit that you find on the forest floor. That fruit has more sugar in it and more alcohol. So, we developed noses that could smell the alcohol at a distance. The alcohol was a marker that could lead us to the sugar.²

As Forsythe half-jokingly adds, the urge to drink alcoholic substance was even prior to the human species itself and occurred already in the earliest stages of evolution.³

It should come as no surprise that broadly understood consumption has been morally problematized since the earliest phases of our civilization.⁴ After all, gluttony was the original sin in the *Old Testament* and the sole reason for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. By the same token, overindulgence receives a special attention in the three *opera magna* of archaic Greek literary production: Hesiod's *Theogony* as well as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In the widely-discussed proem to Hesiod's poem, the Muses abusively address the poet who shepherds his flock on the slopes of Helicon as a 'mere belly.'⁵ As a matter of fact, in the *Iliad*

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¹ A. H. MASLOW, "A Theory of Human Motivation" *Psychological Review* 50 (1943) 370–396, IDEM *Motivation and Personality*, Oxford 1954.

² M. FORSYTHE, *A Short History of Drunkenness. How Why and When Humankind Has Got Merry from the Stone Age to the Present*. London 2017, 13. Forsythe is most probably right that writing a full-scale/global history of drunkenness will be equal to composing the history of the entire humankind.

³ Ibid.: "Before we were human, we were drinkers. Alcohol occurs naturally and always has. When life began four-billion-and-something years ago there were single-cell microbes happily swimming around in the primordial broth eating simple sugars and excreting ethanol and carbon dioxide."

⁴ I am using the term "moral problematization" in the wake of M. FOUCAULT, *The History of Sexuality vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. New York 1990, 14–32.

⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony* 26–28: ποιμένες ἀγραυλοῖ, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον, ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, ἴδμεν δ', εὔτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι. For the discussion and overview of scholarly

it is Agamemnon's δημοβορία (lit. people-eating; greediness) that triggers Achilles' μῆνις and thus moves forward the entire plot of the epic poem,⁶ whereas inordinate consumption as well as γαστήρ is a leitmotif of the *Odyssey*. While hungering Odysseus roams the world far and wide, striving to get back to his beloved Penelope, her aggressive and foolish suitors are consuming his sustenance, breaking thereby the divine law of hospitality (ξενία), for which they are finally punished.⁷ Correspondingly, unruly consumptive habits are the focus point of Greek iambic poetry, where gluttonous kings, who fatten themselves on the substance of their subjects, are relentlessly mocked and ridiculed.⁸

The writers of the later centuries continued to explore these consuming passions, to use the phrase coined by James Davidson,⁹ as a means of social and political criticism. From the Attic Old Comedy, where gluttonous, boorish and effeminate politicians stand as a symbol of everything that threatens the social and political order of Athenian πόλις; through Attic historiography, where gluttoned and drunken tyrants brought their city-states to the brink of destruction,¹⁰ to oratory where gluttonous and effeminate speechifiers are used as paragons of unmanly comportment.

In a similar vein, almost every philosophical system of Greek antiquity strove to exert dietary control on its followers. The well-worn phrase coined purportedly by Socrates and preserved by Plutarch, which stated that "base men live to eat and drink and good men eat and drink to live" is a case in point here.¹¹ Indeed, as Bryan S. Turner observed, the noun diet (δίαίτα) conveys a double meaning, namely "the political government of a sovereign body and the government of a human body. There is both a dietary regimen and a political regime."¹² Both spheres, of a private, individual σῶμα and the social body politic have always been perceived as mutually related to each other. In the *Republic* and the *Laws* Plato devised strict dietary regimen in his imaginary ideal πόλις,¹³ whereas in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle advocated for strict moderation in eating and drinking, since gluttons succumb to their animal urges and resemble irrational beasts rather than rational humans and hence are unsocial

literature on this statement see J. KATZ-K. VOLK, "Mere bellies? A new look at Theogony 26–8," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000) 122–129. Both E. J. BAKKER, *The Meaning of Meat and the Structure of the Odyssey*. Cambridge 2013, 149 n. 31 and N. WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens*. Cambridge 2008, 30 connect the belly (γαστήρ) mentioned by Hesiod to poetic inspiration and production. I shall return to this idea in the first chapter.

⁶ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 30 links Agamemnon's δημοβορία to the needs of human belly.

⁷ The uses of γαστήρ-motif in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was discussed at length by P. PUCCI, *Odysseus Polutropos: Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and the Iliad*. Ithaca–London 1995 esp. 157–208, and BAKKER, *The Meaning of Meat* esp. 135–156.

⁸ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 8–14; 25–60.

⁹ J. DAVIDSON, *Courtesans and Fishcakes. The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*. London 1998.

¹⁰ Theopompus is the most conspicuous example of the critique of drunken tyrants/politicians as is witnessed by the extant fragments of his historical works (*Hellenica*, *Phillipica*), for this see G. S. SCHRIMPTON, *Theopompus the Historian*. Montreal 1991, passim.

¹¹ Plutarch, *How to Study Poetry* 21E: ὑπομνηστέον ὅτι Σωκράτης τούναντίον ἔλεγε, τοὺς μὲν φαύλους ζῆν τοῦ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν ἔνεκα, τοὺς δ' ἀγαθοὺς ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν ἔνεκα τοῦ ζῆν. English translation by F. COLE BABBIT, *Plutarch Moralia: Volume I* [LCL 127]. London 1927, 111–113.

¹² B. S. TURNER, *The Body and Society. Explorations in Social Theory*. London 2008, 6. Also see IDEM, "The Government of the Body: Medical Regimens and the Rationalization of Diet" *The British Journal of Sociology* 33.2 (1982) 254–269.

¹³ P. K. SKIADAS–J. G. LASCARATOS, "Dietetics in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Plato's Concept of Healthy Diet", *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 55 (2001) 532–537.

types.¹⁴ Analogous frameworks were proposed by the earlier Pythagoreans, Neoplatonists and Neopythagoreans, who followed varied plant-based dietary regimens.¹⁵

Further moral problematization of consumption and bodily discipline came with the advent and spread of Christianity. The corrupt human flesh (σάρξ) as well as unruly dietary habits quickly became the marks of sin and sinfulness. What was at stake from this time onwards, was not merely the maintenance of social and/or political orders, but the eternal life of human soul. Consequently, one should not be surprised that strict dietary precepts, inspired by both ancient philosophical tradition and Biblical frameworks, were turned into the pervasive features of the most important works of early Greek Church Fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus*, or John Chrysostom's *Sermons*, to name just two most conspicuous examples.¹⁶ All of these threads and conceptualizations, which stemmed from both ancient as well as Christian frameworks, were continued and further developed in the centuries to come during the Byzantine millennium. I shall analyse these appropriations and development throughout the argument of this thesis.

1.1. Byzantium in the "Long Twelfth Century" – a 'Consumptive' Society?

Leaving the above considerations aside, the central focus of the presented dissertation will be the discourses of consumption and consumptive body explored by the Byzantine authors in the 'long twelfth century'¹⁷ a subject which, has received scarce scholarly attention so far. The Byzantine long twelfth century, with its prolific and experimental literary production offers a rich source of literary insights into the perceptions of body, social uses and abuses of food and drink and the dangers of crapulence. The authors of this period in were obsessed with what and how both others and they ate: food-eating habits were fundamental to carving and maintaining their individual, social and authorial identities.

First indications of what was about to come in Byzantine literature under the Komnenoi dynasty already appeared in the eleventh century. Simeon Seth's compendium *On the Properties of Foodstuffs*, was the first work on this topic since the seventh century work by Paul of Aegina entitled *Medical Compendium in Seven Books*, a fact that is noteworthy and might serve as a mirror of the upcoming changes.¹⁸ Michael Psellos, whose invectives will be the focus-point of the opening chapter of this thesis, explored food/drink consumption in

¹⁴ Certainly, a marker of a cultured and sophisticated πόλις was a civilized dietary regimen which separated its urbane life (βίος) from the brutish bare existence (ζωή) characteristic of the animals, see TURNER, *Body and Society* 7; L. GOURMELEN, "Pratiques alimentaires et représentations de l'humanité primitive" *Food & History* 13.1–3 (2015) 69–83.

¹⁵ In these three instances the 'clean' plant-based diet R. B. HARRIS, *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought: Part Two*. Albany 2002, 17–28.

¹⁶ See for instance S. E. HILL, *Eating to Excess: The Meaning of Gluttony and the Fat Body in the Ancient World*. Santa Barbara 2011. For my discussion of the conceptualization of the sphere of the human belly from antiquity to Byzantine times see chapter 1.

¹⁷ The term has been recently coined by ANDREAS RHOBY during the conference *Byzantine Poetry in the 'Long' Twelfth Century (1081-1204): Perceptions, Motivations and Functions*, Austrian Academy of Sciences, 13–15.06.2018. In the present thesis, for the reasons which I shall expound in the chapter 1, I would like to extend the span of the 'long twelfth century' in Byzantium to c. 1050-1204.

¹⁸ For the editions of these works see *Simeonis Sethi syntagma de alimentorum facultatibus*, B. LANGKAVEL (ed.), Leipzig 1893, and *Paulus Aegineta, Libri I–IV*, J. L. Heiberg (ed.), Leipzig–Berlin 1921, *Paulus Aegineta, Libri V–VII*, IDEM (ed), Leipzig–Berlin 1924. For a general introduction and translation of the work see M.É.P.L. BRUNET, *Siméon Seth, médecin de l'empereur Michel Doucas; sa vie, son oeuvre. Première traduction en français du traité "Recueil des propriétés des aliments par ordre alphabétique."* Bordeaux, 1939.

various literary genres: from the didactic poem on the regimen,¹⁹ through parodic vituperation of a drunken tavern-master who falsely professes to be philosopher,²⁰ his experimental *Chronicle* to playful invectives against monk Sabbaites and Jacob.

It was in the late twelfth century that Niketas Choniates composed his *History*, where gluttony and drunkenness form one of the leitmotifs of the work. Widely understood consumption is the main topic of the famous four *Ptochoprodromika*. In these ‘begging poems,’ a hungry and poverty-stricken scribbler is forced to witness how the others fare sumptuously, while his aggressive wife abuses him verbally and physically for being a failure on all levels of his worthless life.²¹ In the experimental mock-epic or mock-tragedy, *Katomyomachia*, written by Theodore Prodromos, a group of mice soldiers engage in a battle against a voracious beast (that is, of course, a cat) which endangers their very existence.²² It does not seem to be an accident that the very same manuscript (*Marcianus graecus* 524) contains a late twelfth-century text authored by otherwise unknown church official *protekdikos* Andronikos. It presents a versified story of a nun who confessed in a very unusual case against her: she killed and ate her children.²³ Surely, the owner of this miscellany manuscript must have possessed a keen interest in the matters of eating.²⁴ Yet another twelfth-century satire, the anonymous *Timarion*, mocks the contemporary high elite representatives mainly for their chief vices, that is gluttony and constant babbling: an interconnection which will be one of the major points of the analysis presented in the second chapter.²⁵

There are multiple reasons why we witness so many authors so pervasively focused on food-eating in the Byzantine ‘long twelfth century’ and why this phenomenon occurred in an unparalleled extent when compared to the earlier periods. Kazdan and Epstein showed how Byzantine society changed within the periods of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁶ Economic growth combined with the steady increase in agricultural production led to the development of urban areas, to the visible enrichment of some of the classes of Byzantine society and the state itself. These changes are reflected in the extant monumental arts, improvement of building techniques, architectural refinement in design and style, visible sophistication in ceramic styles, boost in trade and population exchange.²⁷

¹⁹ Psellos, *Poem* 15.

²⁰ Psellos, *Speech* 48.

²¹ H. EIDENEIER (ed.), *Ptochoprodromos*, Einföhrung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung Glossar. Köln 1991.

²² See the latest edition of the text by H. HUNGER, *Der byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg. Theodoros Prodromos, Katomyomachia. Einleitung, Text und Übersetzung* (Byzantina Vindobonensia, 3). Graz-Wien-Köln, Böhlau, 1968.

²³ For the edition and the discussion of this short text see R. MACRIDES, “Poetic Justice in the Patriarchate. Murder and Cannibalism in the Provinces” in: *Kingship and Justice in Byzantium 11th-15th Centuries*, Idem (ed.). Aldershot 1999, 137–168. K. WARCABA, *Katomyomachia. Bizantyński epos dla średniozaawansowanych*. Katowice 2017; also see P. MARCINIAK–K. WARCABA, “Katomyomachia as a Byzantine version of mock-epic” in *Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: Text and Context*, A. Rhoby–N. Zagklas (eds.). Turnhout, 97–110.

²⁴ On top of these two mentioned texts, the miscellany manuscript contains an unusual epigram on the teeth (*Περὶ ὀδόντων*): SP. LAMBROS, ‘Ὁ Μαρκλιανὸς κῶδιξ 524’ *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 8.1 (1911) 12.

²⁵ M. ALEXIOU, “Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: A Stylistic Analysis of the *Timarion* (ch. 6–10)” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8 (1983) 29–45; D. KRALLIS, “Harmless Satire, Stinging Critique, Notes and Suggestions for Reading the *Timarion*” in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium Papers from the 43rd Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies Birmingham, March 2010*, M. Saxby–D. Angelov (eds.) Farnham 2013, 221–246.

²⁶ KAZDAN–EPSTEIN, *Change* 74–98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24–73, also see a more recent and detailed analyses of these processes by J. LEFORT, “The Rural Economy Seventh-Twelfth Centuries” in: *The Economic History of Byzantium From the Seventh to the Fifteenth Century vol.*

The increase in wealth across social strata was visible in better and richer clothing patterns, which is well documented both in Western and Byzantine sources, and significantly richer as well as varied diet, especially in the higher echelons of society.²⁸ These are proved not only by the written sources, but also by the evidence in the eleventh to twelfth centuries fine arts and archaeological remains. Joannita Vroom showed that within this period we may witness more widespread use of glazed pottery, and a tendency to use tableware which was significantly bigger than in the preceding and following centuries and significant changes in the patterns of communal dining.²⁹

At the same time, there occurred another deep social shift. The mentality, at least among higher social strata of Byzantine society, seemed to have been under the process of changing. The Byzantines took keener interest in the pleasures of the physical world, while human body became a major point of focus for many authors of the long twelfth century. The first signs of this change might be found in the writings of Michael Psellos.³⁰ In one of his letters, he famously professed:

For I am a man, a soul attached to a body. Therefore, I take pleasure in both thoughts and sensations ... Although I only half-live in the body I must still love it.³¹

Certainly, Psellos was fascinated by physicality: the vivid descriptions of the Emperors and Empresses in his *Chronographia*,³² the crude physicality present in the verse-invectives against Sabbaites and Jacob,³³ the colorful and playful descriptions of Psellos' friend, monk Elias, who is a frequent guest in Constantinopolitan brothels and who is dragged down to physical world by his (sinful) flesh are main witnesses to this.³⁴

The twelfth century saw even deeper relaxation in the social mores. Commenting on 63rd canon of the Council of Carthage (*Περὶ τοῦ ἀφέλεσθαι τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων συμποσία*), Balsamon mentions that the popular public festivals which were held on regular basis during the feasts of various saints in the twelfth century resembled rather ancient orgies. Apparently, the pious women who attended to them had to escape in fear of being sexually assaulted.³⁵ Similarly, the *History* by Niketas Choniates records an extremely relaxed atmosphere in the

I, A. Laiou (ed.), Washington 2002, 225–304 and by G. Dagron, “The Urban Economy, Seventh to Twelfth Century” in: *The Economic History of Byzantium*, 385–453.

²⁸ KAZDAN–EPSTEIN, *Change* 74–81.

²⁹ J. VROOM, “The archaeology of consumption in the eastern Mediterranean: A ceramic perspective” in: *Actas do X Congresso Internacional a Cerâmica Medieval no Mediterrâneo, Silves - Mértola, 22 a 27 outubro 2012, Silves, Câmara Municipal de Silves & Campo Arqueológico de Mértola*, M-J. Gonçalves–S. Gómez-Martínez (eds.), 359–367., 2015. Also see IDEM, “The Changing Dining Habits at Christ's Table” in: *Eat, drink and be merry (Luke 12:19). Food and wine in Byzantium*, L. Brubaker–K. Linardou (eds.), Aldershot 2007, 191–215 esp. 197–200; IDEM, “Byzantine garlic and Turkish delight: Dining habits and cultural change in central Greece from Byzantine to Ottoman times” *Archaeological Dialogues* 7 (2000), 199–216 esp. 202–203; IDEM, *After Antiquity: Ceramics and the Society in the Aegean from the 7th to the 20th Century*. Leiden 2003, 58–63.

³⁰ A compelling detailed analysis of this trait of Psellos thought has been proposed by A. KALDELLIS, *The argument of Psellos' Chronographia*. Leiden–Boston–Köln 1999, 154–166.

³¹ Stress was added by me. I am following English translation by A. KALDELLIS, *The Argument* 165. For the original Greek text see: *Michaelis Pselli scripta minora*, v. 2: *Epistulae*, D. Kranz–K. Drexler (eds.) letter 160.12–16, 187.

³² These were analysed by: J.N. LJUBARSKIJ, “Man in Byzantine Historiography from John Malalas to Michael Psellos,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46.1992 [*Homo Byzantinus: Papers in Honor of Alexander Kazhdan*], 177–186.

³³ In this way, Psellos also initiated a tradition of invectives against drunken rapacious monks. I shall discuss this at more length in the first chapter of this thesis.

³⁴ G.T. DENNIS, “Elias the Monk. Friend of Psellos,” in: *Byzantine Authors. Literary Activities and Preoccupations. Texts and Translations Dedicated to Nicolas Oikonomides*, J.W. Nesbitt (ed.), Leiden–Boston 2003, 43–64.

³⁵ This and similar instances were discussed by KAZDAN & EPSTEIN, *Change* 82–83.

imperial court in Constantinople during the Komnenoi and Angeloi dynasties. Manuel I Komnenos was notorious for his infidelity towards his wife Irene (Bertha von Schulzbach),³⁶ while his famous cousin Andronikos (the *in spe* tyrant) led a sexually active life well until his senility. Choniates does not miss any chance to share the details of his erotic adventures with the readers. As Emmanuel Bourbouhakis remarked:

Niketas knew his audience all too well and as a writer appreciated both their appetites for such erotically (that is, sexually) charged accounts, and the assumed disapproval which legitimized the graphic references to them in a work of history.³⁷

Yet, physical indulgences at the imperial court did not end there: in fact, throughout the cards of the *History*, Choniates criticizes the subsequent emperors for spending their time and public funds for sumptuous feasts and frivolous entertainments, instead of attending to the affairs of the state. In this same vein, the speech by Eustathios of Thessalonike on the occasion of the wedding of Manuel's son Alexios with Agnes, a daughter of the king of France, Louis VII, sarcastically enumerates and describes in minute details the lavish preparations for the occasion. There was so much food and wine ready at the hands of every participant that they stuffed their bellies to the brim and ended up vomiting:

And the edible things came first among all, and there was no one who was not loaded with those things in his belly ... A large number of them also spewed forth the wine like the stupid fool in Homer's poem, of whom it may be said that they had been filled to their very mouths. For the wineskins provided by nature did not contain their excess, but they cast forth the surplus.³⁸

All of these momentous social changes were further supplemented by yet another phenomenon which will be fundamental to the proposed analysis: the unparalleled interest and engagement in ancient Greek literary tradition in the eleventh to twelfth-century Byzantium. The research conducted by numerous Byzantinists over the past few decades showed that the traditional view of Byzantine literary works as failed attempts at imitation of great ancient Greek classics is completely incorrect. Various studies have already proven that the Byzantine authors in the period in question went well beyond simple 'imitation' of ancient Greek literary texts. They re-used (or even 'abused') ancient literary genres in an innovative way, adapted the material taken from the ancient Greek literature to contemporary genres and discourses which were particular to the twelfth-century Byzantium, played skillfully with various ancient literary themes and motifs through various intertextual mechanisms and conformed them to the social concerns characteristic of the period in question.

³⁶ E. Bourbouhakis moreover noticed that the words used by Choniates in reference to Manuel's infidelity is sexually charged: not mincing his words, the historian writes how the emperor 'pricked the hole' of one of his relatives (ὁμογνίου τρυμαλιᾶς ἀθεμίτως ἐμπερονῶν). E. BOURBOUHAKIS, "Exchanging the Devices of Ares for the Delights of Eroses. Erotic Misadventures and the *History* of Niketas Choniates" in: *Plotting with Eros: Essays on the Poetics of Love and the Erotics of Reading*, I. Nilsson (ed.), Copenhagen 2009, 213–234 at: 220.

³⁷ *IBID.*, 221.

³⁸ English translation by A.F. STONE, "Eustathios and the Wedding Banquet for Alexios Porphyrogennetos," in *Feast, Fast or Famine. Food and Drink in Byzantium*, W. Mayer–S. Trzcionka (eds.), Brisbane 2005, 33–42 at 39. The edition of the original text is available in: *Eustathii Thessalonicensis opera minora (magnam partem inedita)*, P. Wirth (ed.), Berlin 1999, 176.11–15: καὶ τὰ ἐδώδιμα διὰ πάντων ἤρχοντο καὶ οὐδεὶς ... τοῦ δὲ οἴνου καὶ ἀπέβλυζον οἱ πλείους κατὰ τὸν Ὀμηρικὸν νήπιον, οἷς μέχρι καὶ αὐτοῦ, εἰπεῖν, τοῦ στόματος πεπλήρωντο οὐ γὰρ ἔστεγον οἱ τῆς φύσεως ἀσκοὶ τὸ πλεονάζον, ἀλλ' ἐξέπτυσαν τὸ περιττόν. The phrase "the stupid fool in Homer's poem" refers to the cyclops Polyphemus. I shall discuss the uses of motifs of Cyclopean feasts, vomiting and belly as an overflowing wineskin in the subsequent chapter of this thesis.

The proliferation of literary production and the sudden and unprecedented in the earlier periods rise in the interest and the creative engagement with the ancient Greek literary heritage led Anthony Kaldellis to label the twelfth century as the period of the 'Third Sophistic,' a term which rightly points to the enormous volume of rhetorical production witnessed in the period, as well as its largely high quality.³⁹ Panagiotis Agapitos went even further, coining the newly emerging literary and educational trends as 'Komnenian modernism' which involved an exceptional amount of experimentation, both on linguistic level (for instance various instances of mixing of blending low and high registers of speech, i.e. vernacular and learned Greek in Tzetzes and the *Ptochoprodromika*) as well as on the generic plane (various generic modulations, transgressions) along other formal experiments.⁴⁰

Probably the most important springboard for the deep changes in literary trends were the copious writings of Michael Psellos. Certainly, Anthony Kaldellis was right to remark that the sudden switch in the literary trends in Byzantium was instigated by Psellos and that the dozens of literati in the twelfth-century Constantinople may be as well perceived as direct literary heirs to Psellos, who built and developed on what he commenced as a pioneer.⁴¹ Indeed, as Stratis Papaioannou argued, one of the most persistent features of Psellos' literary endeavours is a constant drive to transgress generic boundaries.⁴² This same trend can be gleaned from almost all important texts from the long twelfth century: the *Alexiad* by Anna Komnene, a heroic and deeply biography of Manuel Komnenos cast into the form of classical Greek historiography; the four Komnenian novels, which are ripe with numerous generic modulations;⁴³ the *History* by Niketas Choniates, which trespasses generic frames in every possible way, being a mixture of top-notch and linguistically most complex classical historiography, comedy, tragedy, Hellenistic romance, imperial biography and, as I have recently argued, its part pertaining to the ascent and the reign of Andronikos I Komnenos can be understood and explained as a trickster narrative.⁴⁴

1.2. Consumption in Byzantium – an Overview of the Field

With these considerations in mind, let us return to the axis of the current analysis and let us quickly overview the current state of the field of scholarly studies on the consumption

³⁹ A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge 2007, 225–316.

⁴⁰ P. AGAPITOS, "Genre, Structure and Poetics in the Byzantine Vernacular Romances of Love," *Symbolae Osloenses*, 79 (2004) 7–101; IDEM, "John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners: A Byzantine Teacher on Schedography, everyday language and Writerly Disposition" *Medioevo Graeco* 17 (2017) 1–57; also see IDEM, "New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The Schedourgia of Theodore Prodromos," *Medioevo Greco* 15 (2015) 1–41.

⁴¹ For the discussion of Psellos' influence on the Komnenian literati and later generations see: KALDELLIS, *Hellenism* 192–226, esp. 225. The influence of Psellos on the literary developments of the twelfth century cannot be underestimated: all of the most important historiographers of the twelfth centuries can easily be seen as continuators of experimental discursive scheme of Psellos' *Chronographia*, a work which seems to elude all definite categorizations (being an admixture of imperial biography, self-promoting autobiography, a political pamphlet for gossipmongers or a profession of deeper philosophical attitudes).

⁴² S. PAPAIOANNOU, *Michael Psellos. Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*. Cambridge–New York 2013, 238.

⁴³ P. ROILS, *Amphoteroglossia, Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel*. Washington 2005 225–301.

⁴⁴ T. LABUK, "Andronikos I Komnenos in Choniates's *History*: A Trickster Narrative?" in: *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological approaches to Byzantine texts and images*, Ch. Mesis–M. Mullett–I. Nilsson (eds.), Uppsala 2018, 263–285. Also see: *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, A. Simpson–S. Efthymiadis (eds.). Geneva 2009; A. SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study*. Oxford 2013.

and the consumptive body in the Byzantine Empire of the long twelfth century. Certainly, historical and archeological studies into almost every aspect of the consumption of food are more than abundant. To name but a few, Koukoules' *Βυζαντινών βίος καὶ πολιτισμός* is still the basic reference point for all the facets of the daily life of the Byzantines.⁴⁵ Further more recent studies by Johannes Koder,⁴⁶ Ilias Anagnostakis,⁴⁷ Ewald Kislinger,⁴⁸ Chryssa Bourbou,⁴⁹ Joannita Vroom, Andrew Dalby and last but not least, a Polish Byzantinist Maciej Kokoszko,⁵⁰ developed our understanding of various material and social contexts of consumption from the staples of Byzantine diet through food supplies to the changes in dining culture and tableware.

However, one important element is missing: the field lacks almost entirely of literary analysis of various uses of food, cuisine-related terms, literary representations of physical acts of consumption as well as the meaning of consumptive, fat and monstrous bodies. Despite the fact that Byzantine literary texts form the very core of vast majority of the studies mentioned in the above paragraphs, the food scholarship within the field of Byzantine studies, for the major part, has paid little attention to literary traditions within which they emerged, or their intertextual allusiveness which was an inextricable part of Byzantine literature.

To be sure, such approaches do not exhaust the topic of the representations of consumption in Byzantine literary texts.⁵¹ For instance, Jonathan Harris, commenting on the realities of twelfth-century Constantinople quotes a passage from Niketas Choniates' *History*, which illustrates insatiable appetite of John of Poutza, an official from within the

⁴⁵ P. ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΗΣ: *Βυζαντινών βίος και πολιτισμός*, τ. Ε'. *Αἱ τροφαὶ καὶ τὰ πότα*. Athens 1952

⁴⁶ J. KODER, "Ο κηπουρός και η καθημερινή κουζίνα στο Βυζάντιο." Athens 1992. IDEM: "Fresh vegetables for the capital," in: *Constantinople and its hinterland*. C. Mango–G. Dagron (eds.) Aldershot 1995, 49–56. IDEM. "Η καθημερινή διατροφή στο Βυζάντιο με βάση τις πηγές," in: *Βυζαντινών Διατροφή και Μαγειρείαι*, D. ΠΑΠΑΝΙΚΟΛΑ-ΒΑΚΙΡΤΖΙ (ED.), Athens 2005, 17–30. IDEM. "Stew and salted meat—opulent normality in the diet of every day?" in *Eat, drink and be merry*, 59–72. J. KODER, "Everyday food in the middle Byzantine period" in *Flavours and Delights. Tastes and pleasures of ancient and Byzantine cuisine*, I. Anagnostakis (ed.) Athens 2013, 139–156. J. KODER: "Cuisine and Dining in Byzantium," in *Byzantine Culture, Papers from the Conference 'Byzantine Days of Istanbul' held on the occasion of Istanbul being European Cultural Capital 2010*, D. Sakel (ed.), Ankara 2014, 423–438

⁴⁷ See for instance: I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, *Οἶνος ὁ Βυζαντινός. Ἡ ἄμπελος καὶ ὁ οἶνος στὴ βυζαντινὴ ποίηση καὶ ὑμνογραφία*. Athens 1995. IDEM, *Byzantinos oinikos politismos*. Athens 2008. I. ANAGNOSTAKIS–T. ΠΑΠΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΙΣ: "... And Radishes for Appetizers. On Banquets, Radishes and Wine" in *Βυζαντινών Διατροφή*, pp. 147–174.

⁴⁸ E. KISLINGER: "Christians of the East: rules and realities of the Byzantine diet." In: *Food. Culinary history from antiquity to the present*, J.-L. Flandrin, M. Montanari (eds.), New York 1996, 194–206. IDEM "Τρώγοντας και πίνοντας εκτός σπιτίου," in *Βυζαντινών Διατροφή*, pp. 147–174. E. KISLINGER: "Being and Well-Being in Byzantium: the case of Beverages" in *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400–153)*, M. Grünbart–E. Kislinger–A. Muthesius–D. Stathakopoulos (eds.). Wien 2007, 147–154.

⁴⁹ CH. BOURBOU–B. T. FULLER–S. J. GARVIE-LOK–M.P. RICHARDS, "Reconstructing the Diets of Greek Byzantine Populations (6th–15th Centuries AD) Using Carbon and Nitrogen Stable Isotope Ratios." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 146 (2011) 569–581. S.J GARVIE-LOK. *Loaves and fishes: a stable isotope reconstruction of diet in Medieval Greece*. PhD Dissertation, University of Calgary, 2001. CH. BOURBOU, M.P. RICHARDS: "The middle-Byzantine menu: stable carbon and nitrogen isotope values from the Greek site of Kastella, Crete." *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*, 17 (2007) 63–72.

⁵⁰ See for example: M. KOKOSZKO: *Ryby i ich znaczenie w życiu codziennym ludzi późnego antyku i wczesnego Bizancjum (III – VII w.)* [*Fish and Their Meaning in the Everyday Life of Late Antique and Byzantine Populations*], Łódź 2005. *Dietetyka i sztuka kulinarna antyku i wczesnego Bizancjum (II–VII w.)*. Część II: *Pokarm dla Ciała i Ducha*. [*Dietetics and Culinary Art of Antique and Early Byzantine Period (2nd-7th Century)*]. Part II: *Nourishment for the body and soul*. M. KOKOSZKO (ed.). Łódź 2014. For a more comprehensive bibliography of the author see *ibid.*, pp. 562–564. *Cereals of Antiquity and Early Byzantine Time. Wheat and Barley in the Medical Sources (Second to Seventh Centuries AD)*. M. Kokoszko, K. Jagusiak, Z. Rzeźnicka (eds.). Łódź–Kraków 2014.

⁵¹ I have presented a preliminary version of the argument in T. LABUK, "Preliminary Remarks on Byzantine Literary Perception(s) of Fatness (11th to 12th century)," *Scripta Classica* 13 (2016) 101–114.

administration of Manuel Komnenos.⁵² In one of the narrated scenes, which I shall analyse in the Chapter 3, John is portrayed while greedily gulping down his beloved soup for which he purportedly pays two obols to the tavern-keeper. This led Jonathan Harris to the conclusion that a bowl of soup served at the byroad taverns in the twelfth-century Constantinople equaled two bronze coins. While this might have been the case (or not), the main point of the entire episode lies elsewhere: it rather seems to be a product of Choniates' literary education and talent. As I shall argue in the upcoming sections of the presented thesis, Niketas consciously appropriated motifs drawn from ancient Greek iambic and comic poetry in order to ridicule both John and the greedy Komnenian administration.⁵³

This also pertains to Ewald Kislinger's discussion of another portrait of another greedy gluttonous official from Choniates' *History* (which will be the subject of my analysis in Chapter 3 as well). Basing on Choniates' portrayal, Kislinger concludes that some individual at imperial court in Constantinople, who were inspired by the widespread profligate behaviors in the twelfth century, went as far as drinking seven liters of water.⁵⁴ Yet, not only is it physically impossible for the human belly to contain such a quantity of liquid,⁵⁵ but also the episode should be rather understood as a figment of Choniates' imagination in which he again consciously appropriated various motifs drawn from ancient comic/iambic and sympotic tradition.⁵⁶

Final example comes from a reading of one of the letters written by a twelfth-century scholar Michael Italikos to his friend Theodore Prodromos.⁵⁷ Quoting it, Kotłowska concludes that the Byzantines disliked cheese and derived the ancient Greek noun for a tyrant (τύραννος) with a noun which denoted cheese (τυρός). The author of the study ignores the fact that Italikos is sharing a literary joke with his friend Prodromos, who authored numerous satires and surely must have appreciated such veiled jokes.⁵⁸

⁵² J. HARRIS. *Constantinople, Capital of Byzantium*. London: Continuum 2007, p. 112. Niketas Choniates, *History*, 57.53–63.

⁵³ I have discussed this topic partly in T. LABUK, "Aristophanes in the Service of Niketas Choniates: Gluttony, Drunkenness and Politics in the Χρονική Διήγησις," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 66 (2016) 127–152.

⁵⁴ E. KISLINGER, "Being and Well-being...", 153, Niketas Choniates, *Hist.* 113.87–114.10.

⁵⁵ It should be noted that the maximum capacity of a human belly varies from two to four liters: S. SANTORO, "Stomachs: does the size matter? Aspects of intestinal satiety, gastric satiety, hunger and gluttony," *Clinics (Sao Paulo)* 67.4 (2012), 301–303.

⁵⁶ W. TREADGOLD, "The Unwritten Rules for Writing Byzantine History" in: *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade 22–27 August 2016*. Belgrade 2016, 277–292 at: 286 argues that while the episodes related to both Johns are "absurd exaggerations," they must have been based on some kind of hearsay which spread at the imperial court in Constantinople, where Choniates pursued his professional career. While the exaggeration, as I have pointed out above, cannot be doubted, its point and literary (and not factual) background is a completely different story. R.-J. LILIE, "Reality and Invention: Reflections on Byzantine Historiography" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68 (2014) 157–210 at: 169–170 argued that these vastly exaggerated stories are nothing but a literary fiction, a view to which I closely adhere.

⁵⁷ A. KOTŁOWSKA. *Zwierzęta w kulturze literackiej Bizantyńczyków - Αναβλέψατε εις τα πετεινά ... [The Animals in the Byzantine Literary Culture - Αναβλέψατε εις τα πετεινά...]*. Poznań 2014, 160.

⁵⁸ Michel Italikos. *Lettres et discours*. P. Gautier (ed.), Paris 1972, 237–238. On the joke see *ibid.* n. 5 at 237: „Italikos s'est amuse à forger une etymologie les anciens avouaient leur ignorance." On cheese-consumption, positive attitude towards cheese-consumption in the middle Byzantine period and the literary descriptions of cheese see the recent and very good study by I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, "La trous dans le fromage: Le description de Michel Psellos et la recherché contemporaine," in: *Latte e Latticini. Aspetti della produzione e del consume nelle società mediterranee dell'Antichità e del Medioevo*, I. Anagnostakis–A. Pellettieri (eds.), Lagonegro 2016, 129–146.

At the very same time, literary depictions of a consumptive body, the rich symbolism of body parts and organs has not attracted much attention of the Byzantinists yet. The focus point of the field has laid so far on reconstructing and interpreting the ideals of beauty and proportion, or the sociological meaning of ideal sacred bodies, while deformation, monstrosity, animality, obesity or even ugliness which are present in a plethora of literary texts from the period in question has been only briefly discussed. A recent volume, edited by Jelena Bogdanović and dedicated to the perceptions of the body and the sacred spaces (otherwise very good and insightful), is an excellent case in point.⁵⁹ Similarly, Myrto Hatzaki showed that Byzantine concept of a beautiful male body was associated with perfection and statue-like symmetry. Ugliness, on the other hand was linked with lack of perfection, monstrosity, and stood as a paragon of wickedness.⁶⁰ While these cannot be subjected to any doubt, especially if one considers a fact that such a labelling is a standard sociological mechanism employed within any given group to identify those elements who are dangerous and unwanted),⁶¹ there still remain many more questions to be asked, interpretative problems to be resolved and material to be researched.

It must be nonetheless noted that there exists at least a handful of studies which are significant exceptions to these overall trends in the research on consumption in Byzantium. Analysing the *Life of St. Symeon the Holy Fool*, which was composed by Leontius of Neapolis in the seventh century, Derek Krueger identified many allusions to Greek comic tradition in the scenes presenting unruly consumption and sexually aggressive behaviour of the σαλός.⁶² In her pioneering studies of the twelfth-century anonymous *Ptochoprodromika*, Margaret Alexiou demonstrated how the author of the four begging poems operates within the tradition of Aristophanic comedies, where foodstuffs, tableware and the very acts of consumption are (almost) always used metonymically and, more often than not, are endowed with sexual undertones.⁶³ Lynda Garland, treading in Alexiou's footsteps, proposed the first and so far only general overview of the discourse(s) of gluttony and hunger employed by the authors of the twelfth century, identifying conscious appropriation of Aristophanic terms, not only in the

⁵⁹ *Perceptions of the Body and Sacred Space in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, J. Bogdanović (ed.), New York 2018.

⁶⁰ M. HATZAKI, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium. Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text*, New York 2009. It must be stressed in this place that Hatzaki's study presents the only longer attempt at analysing and interpreting Byzantine social meanings of ugliness, for this see *IBID.* 33–48. Whereas, to the best of my knowledge, S. CONSTANTINOUS, "Grotesque Bodies in Hagiographical Tales. The Monstrous and the Uncanny in Byzantine Collections of Miracle Stories" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 64 (2010) 43–54 is the sole study which aims at discussing the monstrous and the deformed body, but unlike the presented thesis, not as a part of comic imagery and social critique, but rather in terms of its overall positive function in the miraculous healing narratives.

⁶¹ For this see J.P. LEYENS ET AL. "The Emotional Side of Prejudice: The Attribution of Secondary Emotions to Ingroups and Outgroups," *Personality and Psychology Review* 4 (2000), 186–197. Also see Jonathan Haidt's extensive work on the food-related emotion of disgust and its moral meanings, discussed for instance in J. HAIDT–P. ROZIN–C. MCCAULEY–S. IMADA, "Body, Psyche, and Culture: The Relationship between Disgust and Morality," *Psychology Developing Societies* 9 (1997), 107–131.

⁶² D. KRUEGER, *Symeon the Holy Fool. Leontius's Life in the Late Antique City*. Berkley–Los Angeles–London 1996, 90 ff.

⁶³ M. ALEXIOU, "The Poverty of Écriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems" *BMGS* 10:1 (1986) 1–40; EADEM, "New Departures in the Twelfth Century" in: Eadem, *After Antiquity, Greek Language, Myth and Metaphor*. Ithaca–London 2002 127–148; for short analyses of the theme of gluttony in other twelfth-century texts, chiefly *Timarion* see also: EADEM, "Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: A Stylistic Analysis of the Timarion (ch. 6–10)" *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8 (1982/3) 29–45; EADEM, *After Antiquity* 100–111.

Ptochoprodromika, but also in *Timarion*, Choniates' *History* (along with other texts) and identifying plausible erotic overtones so widely explored by the authors of Attic Old Comedy.⁶⁴

1.3. 'Aristophanic Boom' in the 'Long Twelfth Century'

Indeed, Aristophanic comedies seem to have been one of the main sources and points of reference of this widely-used discourse of consumption and bodily excess. As Lynda Garland remarked:

Gluttony has always been a suitable subject for humour, with its roots in the Aristophanic comedy so beloved of the educated Byzantines, and this reaches a peak in the mid to late twelfth century, where we have extended pieces where gluttony, or the desire to eat to excess is one of the predominant themes ... This emphasis is unique to twelfth century.⁶⁵

To be sure, such Aristophanic influences, inspirations and re-appropriation should not come as any surprise. His comedies stood as one of the cornerstones of Byzantine *curriculum studiorum*, while Aristophanes himself is frequently referred to by the Byzantine literati simply as the Comic Poet (ὁ Κωμικός).⁶⁶ The so-called school-triad, which consisted of *Plutus*, *Clouds* and *Frogs* (with the occasional inclusion of *Knights*).⁶⁷ The plays of the comic playwright, along with other canon texts of ancient Greek tragedians, historians and orators served as the fundament of Byzantine school system. They were read, interpreted and analysed times and times again, most probably up to a point where the pupils knew parts of them by heart. Still more importantly however, the plays of Aristophanes served as models of an ideal Atticizing diction, proper grammatical forms, and sources for the learned versions of common-speech words which all pupils were supposed to know and use in written and spoken discourse.⁶⁸

Byzantine *lexika* might serve as one of the best illustrations of how deeply inculcated Aristophanic comedies were in Byzantine literary culture. In *Suda*, the longest and by far the most famous *lexicon*, one might find direct and indirect quotations from Aristophanic comedies as well as references to them in five thousand out thirty thousand entries.⁶⁹ Hence,

⁶⁴ L. GARLAND, "The Rhetoric of Gluttony and Hunger in twelfth-century Byzantium" in: *Feast, Fast or Famine. Food and Drink in Byzantium*, W. Meyer-S. Trzcionka (eds.), Brisbane 2005, 43–56.

⁶⁵ GARLAND, "The Rhetoric of Hunger and Gluttony ...", 50. There is one caveat to be added to this point: as we shall see in the Chapter One, such an emphasis is not at all *unique* to twelfth century only, since it is explored in some of the best and most innovative writings of Michael Psellos: in his *Chronographia*, his letters and two well-known invectives, against Sabbaites and monk Jacob. As well as, on a much smaller scale other authors of the eleventh century who were included in the circle of Psellos, for this see F. BERNARD, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry* 1025–1081. Oxford 2014, 253–290.

⁶⁶ N. G. WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium*. London 1996, 24; just as Homer was referred to as the Poet (ὁ Ποιητής), and Demosthenes as the Orator (ὁ Πρωτόρ), which reflects their importance within the school syllabus as well as broader literary culture in the Byzantine Empire (Ibid.).

⁶⁷ See for instance the late Byzantine school manuscript Madrid BN Mss/4683, which includes the standard triad extended by the addition of *Knights*, Tzetzes' commentary and the *Vita Aristophanis* composed by Thomas Magister: P. CABALLERO SÁNCHEZ, "Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional Mss/4683: il codice e i suoi scoliasti", *Medioevo greco*, 13 (2013) 1–10. For studies on the manuscript tradition of Aristophanes' comedies see A. TURYN, *The Byzantine Manuscript Tradition of the Tragedies of Euripides*. Urbana 1957 335–337. Also see C. N. EBERLINE, *Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of the Ranae of Aristophanes*. Meisenhein 1980 119; N.G. WILSON, "The Triclinian Edition of Aristophanes," *Classical Quarterly* 12 (1962) 32–47. Later manuscripts preserve also dyads, for this see J.W. WHITE, "Manuscripts of Aristophanes" *Classical Philology* 1.1 (1906), 1–20.

⁶⁸ R. WEBB, "A Slavish Art? Language and Grammar in Late Byzantine Education and Society," *Dialogos* 1 (1994) 81–103; also see WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium* 18–27.

⁶⁹ I.e. according to the estimates of WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium* 146.

to exaggerate slightly, one sixth of this monumental compilation is preoccupied with one author, while bits and pieces extracted from his works appear sometimes in the most unexpected places within the *lexikon*. As Wilson commented:

The compiler, or compilers, of the *Suda* demonstrate by their choice of material that they had unusual tastes in literature or access to a library with a strange stock of books. The modern reader cannot fail to be struck by the predominance of quotations from the text of Aristophanes and the scholia on his plays ... For the present purpose, however, it is to be noted that of 30,000 entries over 5,000 derive from Aristophanic text and scholia, a proportion which can scarcely be justified even by an enthusiastic assessment of the undoubted value of Aristophanes as a source of Attic diction of the classical period.⁷⁰

Such Aristophanic preponderance is by no means peculiar to *Suda* only. The earlier, ninth-century lexicon compiled by the patriarch Photios,⁷¹ where Aristophanic comedies as well as the references to the other authors of the Attic Old Comedy and to the scholia to Aristophanes' plays can be found in numerous places. This is probably due to the fact that Photios re-used the work of the second-century AD grammarian Phrynichos (*Σοφιστική Παρασκευή* or *Ἐκλογή*)⁷², who himself was, as Wilson put it, "an abundant source of the quotations from the Old Comedy."⁷³

While Aristophanic comedies played a crucial role in the Byzantine educational system throughout the Byzantine millennium, it was in the late eleventh and twelfth century that the interest in them was literally booming.⁷⁴ One of the best examples to illustrate this emerging literary interest is Gregory Pardos (or Gregory of Corinth), famous not only for his works on grammar and poetics tropes, but chiefly for his treatise on the dialects of ancient Greek language.⁷⁵ Just as in the above-mentioned treatise of Phrynichos (as well as various other Byzantine treatises), Aristophanes is presented by Gregory as a perfect model for Attic dialect and diction and numerous grammatical, syntactical as well as orthographical examples specific

⁷⁰ Ibid.; it must be underlined that "the unusual tastes" and an access to a peculiar library are Wilson's own perspectives and theory. Perhaps the explanation is much simpler than that and there was nothing strange in giving so much space to Aristophanic material, especially if we consider the status of his comedies in the Byzantine school syllabuses. See also E. DICKEY, *Ancient Greek Scholarship: A Guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises from Their Beginnings to the Byzantine Period*. New York 2007, 90. Besides, as KALDELLIS noticed, WILSON'S study is notorious for "derogatory comments and unnecessary adjectives" which appear on almost every page: A. KALDELLIS, "Classical Scholarship in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in: *Medieval Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics*, Ch. Barber–D. Jenkins (eds.), Leiden–Boston 2009, 1–44 at: 2.

⁷¹ The newest edition available in *Photii patriarchae lexicon*, I–III, Ch. Teodoritis (ed.), Berlin 1982–2012.

⁷² The introduction along with the edition of the text is available in *Phrynichos' Ekloge*, E. FISCHER (ed.), Berlin–New York 1974.

⁷³ Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* 91; indeed, in his Atticistic treatise Phrynichos quotes almost all important representatives of Athenian Old Comedy: Eubulos, Antiphanes, Cratinos, Pherecrates, Strattis, Eupolis, Theopompos, and Pherecrates, for this see the *Index locorum* in Fischer's edition of the work (cited above). Interestingly enough, Phrynichos, just as the Byzantine literati in the centuries to come, believed that the textual remains of the Old Comedy might provide even better examples of proper Attic forms than the fifth-century prose texts: DICKEY, *Ancient Greek Scholarship* 96–97 with a relevant biography on this subject.

⁷⁴ P. MARCINIĄK, *Greek Drama in Byzantine Times*. Katowice 2004. Also see B. VAN DEN BERG, "Playwright, Satirist, Atticist: The Reception of Aristophanes in Twelfth-century Byzantium" in I. Nilsson–P. Marciniak, *A companion to Byzantine Satire*. Leiden–Boston (in press).

⁷⁵ The only edition of the text is available in: *Gregorii Corinthii et aliorum grammaticorum libri de dialectis linguæ Græcæ*, G. H. Schæfer (ed.), Leipzig 1811.

to the Attic dialect, which he presents are illustrated through the examples taken directly from Aristophanic comedies. What is perhaps even more interesting, Gregory includes in his work not only references to the standard triad of school-texts Aristophanes (*Plutus*, *Clouds*, *Frogs* with occasional addition of *Knights*), but also less-well known to the Byzantines comedies such as *Peace*, *Lysistrata*, *Acharnians*, *Birds*, and even *Thesmophoriazusae*.⁷⁶

Yet, there is much more to this phenomenon. It is in the twelfth century under the Komnenoi dynasty that we witness the production of scholia on Aristophanic comedies for the first time in more than 700 years, which is a telling fact which reflects the booming interest in Aristophanic material.⁷⁷ Somewhere in the second part of the twelfth century John Tzetzes produced his commentary on *Clouds*, *Birds* and *Frogs*, along with short prefaces and summaries of *Knights* and *Plutus*. To these should be added Tzetzes' didactic iambic poems on the origins of comedy and tragedy, which exhibit the deepened scholarly interest in the emergence and function of ancient Greek comic tradition as well as Tzetzes' *Letters* and an 'appendix' to them, which are brimming with quotations and allusions to Aristophanic comedies.⁷⁸

Following Tzetzes' footsteps, Eustathios of Thessalonike undertook writing the commentaries to Aristophanic comedies which are available now only in small and scattered fragments in the extant corpus of the *scholia*.⁷⁹ It does not come as any surprise that his extant works are teeming with quotations from the works of the comic playwright. In his monumental commentaries on Homeric *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, the references to the works of 'the Comic Poet' Eustathios, following the wide-spread fashion of his times, regularly refers to Aristophanic comedies when he satirizes or derides an individual.⁸⁰ The examples are more than numerous.

In his *Capture of Thessalonike* Eustathios abuses the infamous Stephanos Hagiochristophorites, a disdainful and violent henchman from Andronikos' I Komnenos

⁷⁶ Certainly, it is hard to establish whether Gregory actually knew and read the 'non-school' texts of Aristophanes or quotes them indirectly via one of the sources he was using (especially if we consider the fact that *Thesmophoriazusae* which he quotes a number of times have survived only in one 14th-century manuscript). The situation is all the more complicated if we consider the fact that despite the booming interest there has not survived even one manuscript containing Aristophanic comedies from the twelfth century. Another puzzling question which remains to be answered and which hasn't been addressed yet (and which is well beyond the scope of the present study) is another issue of Aristophanic reception in the twelfth century: that Aristophanes is treated by Gregory a model for Attic diction is one thing, the other is how Gregory organizes the material which he uses, how he chooses the quotations, how he tries to teach and delight his readers: after all we are talking about the texts which were written to stir laughter and amusement. For instance, discussing the preference of usage of participles instead of nouns in *On Dialects* 2.425-432, Gregory quotes the lines from the humorous opening of *Frogs*, a fact which could not have escaped the educated readers, who were taught their Attic Greek on the basis of this text.

⁷⁷ For the general discussion of the tradition of scholia on Aristophanes' comedies see DICKEY, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 28–31.

⁷⁸ P. AGAPITOS, "John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners: A Byzantine Teacher on Schedography, Everyday Language and Writerly Disposition," *Medioevo Greco* 17 (2017) 1–57, *passim*. Agapitos managed to show how Tzetzes employs (at times obscene and vulgar) Aristophanic language in his criticism of poorly-educated teachers/writers in Constantinople. On the engagement of Tzetzes and other 12th-century authors with the comic poetry see P. ROILLOS, *Amphoteroglossia* 231–238. Also see A. PIZZONE, "Autography and strategies of self-authorization in John Tzetzes," *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* (forthcoming).

⁷⁹ DICKEY, *Ancient Greek Scholarship* 30. WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium* 202.

⁸⁰ This 'fashion' was discussed by GARLAND, 'The Rhetoric of Gluttony.'

retinue, with a line drawn from *Peace* and *Frogs*.⁸¹ In yet another passage in the *Capture of Thessalonike*, Eustathios ‘shoots at’ David, the chief commander of the city during the siege of Thessaloniki in 1185, with another portion of Aristophanic imagery, this time derived from *Knights*:

And after opening his mouth to this extent he sat gaping thereafter (χασμημάμενος), like a statue rather than a man “as if he was thwarting the dried figs” (ἐμποδίζων οἶον ἰσχάδας), in the words of the Comic Poet.⁸²

The passage quotes a line from *Knights* (755), which appears in a few entries in *Suda*.⁸³ Certainly, by referring to Aristophanic material Eustathios is playing with the educated audience of his work. In the comic tradition, hence both in the comedies of Aristophanes and the plays of other writers of Athenian Old Comedy, the derivatives of the verb χάσκω (to gape, to yawn, to speak with one’s mouth open) pointed to utter stupidity of Athenian δῆμος: they babbled excessively and were easily led astray by the trivial (and aggressive) speech of their manipulative politicians. It is for this reason that in the Old Comic tradition that Athenian *polis* was called ἡ Κεχηναίων πόλις (hence ‘Gapenian polis’, i.e. the City of Gapers).⁸⁴ As I intend to argue, such a focus on the mouth, as an organ which both consumes and produces speech, and its symbolic significance is one of the most characteristic traits of comic imagery.

Certainly, (almost) each and every author from the period of the long twelfth century followed this fashion of re-using Aristophanic material in satirizing other individuals, be it gluttonous court officials or even emperors, monks who were unable to curb their bodily passions, poorly educated rustics who aspired to be included in Constantinopolitan elite or even literary θέατρα.⁸⁵ At times, however, we encounter direct references to Aristophanes’ comedies in the most unexpected pieces of literature produced in the period in question. One of such baffling instances is an extant judgement of divorce produced by John Apokaukos, the bishop of Naupaktos, in which he quotes a line from *Clouds* and peppers the entire occurrence with additional comic overtones.⁸⁶ Even more, as Patrick Viscuso showed, Theodore Balsamon in his commentary on St. Basil’s canon no. 70, shows how clergymen defile their lips through cunnilingus; “using women’s privy parts as cups (ὡς κύλικι) ... [they] drink the

⁸¹ Aristophanes, *Peace* 183, Aristophanes, *Frogs* 466: in the first cases the line is humorously uttered by Hermes who abuses Trygaeus (the protagonist of the play), in the second instance it is gluttonous Heracles, who is the point of abuse. I refer to the following editions of Aristophanic comedies: *Acharnians, Knights, Clouds, Wasps, Peace, Birds: Aristophanis fabulae, tomus 1: Acharnenses, Equites, Nubes, Vespae, Pax, Aves*. N. G. Wilson (ed.), Oxford 2007. *Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae, Frogs, Ecclesiazusae, Plutus: Aristophanis Fabulae, tomus 2: Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae, Ranae, Ecclesiazusae, Plutus*, N. G. Wilson (ed.) Oxford 2007. The very same line appears as well in *De emendanda vita monachica* in an extremely ironic excerpt of the treatise *Eustathii Thessalonicensis De emendanda vita monachica*, K. Metzler (ed.). Berlin – New York 2006 and is preserved in *Suda* μ 1027; τ 743.

⁸² I am following the English translation by J. MELVILLE-JONES, *Eustathios of Thessaloniki, The Capture of Thessaloniki*. Sydney 1987, 97

⁸³ *Suda* ι 711: apparently it must have been ancient Athenian proverb, which pointed to unbridled rapaciousness and abusive nature of the people during the assemblies in the Pnyx.

⁸⁴ I owe the term ‘Gapenian polis’ D. WHITHEAD’s translation in the *Suda Online* project; another alternative translation of Aristophanic neologism would be: The City of Gapens. The other related term which appears in *Acharnians* is χαυνοπολίτης (as *LSJ* has it: a gaping fool, who swallows all that is told to him). *Suda*, basing upon the tradition of scholia to Aristophanic comedies, focuses on the ‘gaping’ in a number of places, for this see the entries κ 1463, 1464, 1466, 1467 2234; χ 146; cf. Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 628–657.

⁸⁵ For the phenomenon of θέατρα see various contributions in M. GRÜNBART (ed.), *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter/Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and The Middle Ages*. Berlin–New York 2007.

⁸⁶ Text and commentary in M.T. FÖGEN, “Rechtssprechung mit Aristophanes,” *Rechtshistorisches Journal* 1 (1982) 74–82.

detestable liquid (κατάπτυστον πόμα) and desecrate their lips. Two sexually-charged expressions which Balsamon used here are of undoubtedly Aristophanic origin: κατάπτυστον πόμα is a conscious borrowing from Aristophanes' *Knights* 1285 (ἀπόπτυστον δρόσον) which refers to licking women's vaginal secretions, while δρόσος, just as various other liquids, as we know thanks to the studies by John Henderson and John Davidson, is used frequently by the authors of Athenian Old Comedy as a metonym for cunnilingus.⁸⁷

1.4. Consumptive Discourse in Twelfth-century Byzantine Literature

These things said, identifying a plethora of intertextual links which connect Byzantine literary works with the writings of Aristophanes and other authors of Athenian comic tradition is only a one side of the coin. The popularity of Aristophanic plays among the authors of the long twelfth century can be easily gleaned from the *indices locorum* of the available editions of the texts produced in this period. Yet, such an inevitably limited approach, would lead us to nothing more than producing a statement which should be by this time clear enough: Byzantine literati in the twelfth century knew Aristophanes very well and quoted his works lavishly.

While this cannot be doubted, it neither explains why such a widespread literary trend occurred in the period of the 'long twelfth century,' what social factors stood behind this specious fashion and how it can be both understood and explained, and the proposed thesis will be an attempt to address and propose some possible explanations to these questions, which have not been addressed at length so far. I have shown above that the deep social changes were occurring from the onset of the eleventh century. With the enrichment of certain groups of population, one could trace important changes in the social mores. Such a sudden outburst of interest in Aristophanes coincided with these advancements.⁸⁸ Anthony Kaldellis noted that the interest in worldly sensual pleasures gave further incentive for the Byzantine authors to explore more closely at ancient Greek literature.⁸⁹

In the period when widely understood consumption became the 'hot topic' of the day, the increasing interest in the comic tradition should not surprise us. John Wilkins explained this striking materiality of Old Comedy in the following words:

⁸⁷ P. VISCUOSO, "Theodore Balsamon's Canonical Images of Women" *GRBS* 3 (2005) 317–326 at 323–324. J. HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*. New York 1991, 76, 145; J. N. DAVIDSON, *Courtesans and Fishcakes. The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*. London 1997, 73–138.

⁸⁸ A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge 2007, 225–316. For Psellos in this context see e.g. IDEM, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia* 154–166. The erotic themes and motifs in Komnenian literature were discussed by I. NILSSON: *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure: Narrative Technique and Mimesis in Eumathios Makrembolites' Hysmine & Hysminias*. Uppsala 2001; EADEM, "Desire and God Have Always Been Around, in Life and Romance Alike" in: *Plotting with Eros. Essays on the Poetics of Love and the Erotics of Reading*, EADEM (ed.), Copenhagen 2009 235–260, EADEM "In Response to Charming Passions: Erotic Readings of a Byzantine Novel", in *Pang of Love and Longing: Configurations of Desire in Premodern Literature*, A. Cullhed et al (eds), Cambridge 2013, 176–202; IDEM "To touch or not to touch – erotic tactility in Byzantine literature", in: *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, S. A. Harvey–M. Mullett (eds.), Washington D.C. 2017, 239–57.

⁸⁹ KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 247: "The militarism, follies, and excesses of the Komnenian regime, especially under Manuel, gave the sophists ground to further Psellos' exploration of sexual life. As with Eustathios, the panegyrist of Manuel and critic of Andronikos, engagement with classical literature was Janus-like, serving both to exalt the extravagance of the princes and to satirize them, sometimes simultaneously. The classical turn was facilitated by the new moral context."

Comedy is a particularly materialist form of drama; if the subject is lawcourts, voting funnels at the bar will come into play, if peace, hoes and mattocks will be wielded by farmers, in the context of eating, the verses of comedy are filled with food, with pots and pans in which food was prepared and served and with the cups and bowls in which liquids were contained ... Comedy manipulates these 'things': it puts their nature under the spotlight ... and explores their places in the social and religious world ...⁹⁰

Studying the poetics of the four Komnenian novels, Panagiotis Roilos argued that what sets them apart decisively from their Hellenistic models are 'comic modulations,' that is a large body of comic scenes which are interpolated onto the 'traditional' discourse of the novels.⁹¹ Roilos showed that these modulations or interpolations are almost always introduced in the banquet scenes, "the dinner parties ... become the performative contexts of comic happenings" and such comic elements are, more often than not, infused with satirical overtones.⁹² It is my contention, and a fundamental premise of my thesis that Roilos' assertion could easily be extended to other literary works produced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Byzantium.

Furthermore, Margaret Alexiou, analyzing the poetics of the four *Ptochoprodromika*, identified similarities in motifs between the four begging poems and Aristophanic comedies. These are, more often than not, conscious borrowings, re-appropriations and playful allusions which were supposed to be deciphered by the educated audience:

... there is no objective difficulty in presupposing a close and direct knowledge of Aristophanes (and other comic writers) on the part of author, as well as *predisposition to compare and contrast past with present mores*, since any contemporary of John Tzetzes or Eustathios of Thessaloniki, especially if he were intimate with the Komnenian court, would have enjoyed access to the latest literary discussions as well as written commentaries on the subject.⁹³

What Alexiou noticed in the above passage is of utmost importance. Knowledge of Aristophanic texts and quoting/alluding to them is only one aspect of this phenomenon. Comedy played important corrective function in the milieu of Classical Athens and exposed those sets of behaviours which endangered social well-being. This fact was well known to Byzantine literati and their re-use of comic material conveyed, often, deeper moral sense.

1.5. The Argument: The Byzantine Language of *Iambos*

In my thesis, I shall focus on such a re-use and re-appropriation of themes and motifs drawn from the literary tradition of Athenian Old comedy in various works composed in the eleventh and chiefly twelfth century. The genres which will be covered span from poetic invective in iambic meter and in the form of religious canon (Psellos' *In Sabbaitam* and *In Iacobum monachum*), the anonymous twelfth-century 'Lucianic' satire *Timarion*, high-style historiography (Niketas Choniates' *History*), short rhetorical pieces (composed by Euthymios Tornikes and Nikephoros Chrysoberges) and a narrative and eyewitness account of a failed palace coup (Nikolaos Mesarites' *Λόγος ἀφηγηματικός*).

⁹⁰ J. WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef. The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy*. New York 2000, 1.

⁹¹ ROILLOS, *Amphoteroglossia* 227.

⁹² Ibid. 246.

⁹³ M. ALEXIOU, "The Poverty of Écriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 10 (1986), 1–40.

My analysis of the ‘comic interpolations’ in various works of twelfth-century Byzantine literature will draw heavily on the methodology put forward by Nancy Worman in her study of the abusive talk in Classical Athens. Searching for persistent features and semiotic patterns of insulting talk in ancient Athenian literature, Worman asserted that they form what she labelled as the ‘iambic discourse.’⁹⁴ The main tenets of such a discourse might be summarized as follows:

1. Since *iambos* originated in manly drunken settings of Athenian symposia, its abusive speech focused chiefly on exposing (and exploring) uncontrolled ‘feminine’ urges for the consumption of food and drink and for sexual intercourse.
2. *Iambos*, which from the fifth century BC onwards became the main vehicle for comedy and lampooning, forges, as Worman put it, a “concretely crude sensibility,” which revolves around vulgar and obscene appetites.
3. For this very reason, human body became the central focal point of iambic discourse. As Worman exhibited, it is always presented in a piecemeal fashion: it is fragmented, reconfigured, reduced to its consumptive organs, while its monstrous limbs and/or outgrown organs are always endowed with symbolic significance.
4. Since the iambic discourse originated and was widely employed in strictly performative society of ancient Athens in which the most prominent social roles were played by public speakers (orators/politicians), in this iambic scheme of Bachtinian grotesque body, special place is given to all bodily orifices, among which the mouth became a dominant metonymy of all socially dangerous and unacceptable behaviours which threaten the *status of quo* of the polis and endanger its well-being.⁹⁵ The blatantly irreverent tone of iambic speech was targeted against those who spoke publicly, thence such a focus given to mouth, an organ which produces speech and which consumes, is perfectly understandable.⁹⁶
5. The iambic discourse, according to Worman, can be easily perceived as an epitome of Bachtinian grotesque style, which not only focuses on the body and its needs but also is typically characterized by exaggeration, excessiveness and hyperbolism.
6. Lastly, Worman showed that *iambos* is an extremely elusive genre and its core elements might be found in the works of Homer, in Platonic dialogues, Athenian comedy, satyr drama (Euripides’ *Cyclops*), forensic oratory (Aeschines and Demosthenes) and even in Theophrastus’ *Characters*. And, although it reappears interpolated in varied generic schemes, it sustains stable imagery and its irreverent tone.⁹⁷

It is my contention that iambic imagery, understood in such a way, as well as the corrective function of the insulting talk characteristic to *iambos*, was used and explored widely in the Byzantine long twelfth century and that the application of Worman’s methodology might shed

⁹⁴ N. WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens*. Cambridge 2008, 8–19.

⁹⁵ P. BOURDIEU, *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA 1991.

⁹⁶ What Worman has overlooked and what explains this focus on the mouth is the fact that disgust, an emotion which, as I intend to show, is regularly evoked by the crude sensibility of iambic aesthetics is related to the mouth and the sensation of bad taste: H.A. CHAPMAN–D.A. KIM–J.M. SUSKIND–A.K. ANDERSON, “In Bad Taste: Evidence for the Oral Origins of Disgust,” *Science* 323.5918 (2009) 1222–1226. For this also see note 61.

⁹⁷ A series of studies on the genre of *iambos* is present in the volume by A. Cavarzere–A. Aloni–A. Barchiesi (eds.), *Iambic Ideas. Essays on Poetic Tradition from Archaic Greece to the Late Roman Empire*. Oxford 2001. Also see BERNARD, *Reading and Writing* 50–51. Perception of *iambos* and its affinities with invective was discussed by A. ROSTEIN, *The idea of iambos*. New York 2010, 319–346.

additional light not only on its varied uses, but also on the innovative appropriation(s) of ancient Greek literature in the middle Byzantine period. Such a contention seems to be more plausible by virtue of the above-discussed rise in the interest in the ancient comic material, as well as the factors which deserve to be briefly discussed below.

First and foremost, just as Classical Athens, Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was chiefly a performative society, though the character of performativity changed over time. As Floris Bernard showed in his study of the eleventh-century poetry, the rise of the Komnenian clan to power marks a significant social change. Up until this date, the intellectuals formed high-ranked cliques in the Constantinopolitan court, cliques which were in close connection to the emperor and competed with each other in the public poetic contests (the λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες).⁹⁸ In such a setting, the literati contested with each other, showing off the perfection of their literary skill and lampooning the lack thereof of their contestants. Psellos' poetic invectives, the focal point of the first chapter, are the products of such an environment.

Together with the installment of the Komnenian dynasty on the imperial throne there occurred a radical social shift. With the members of the clan of the Komnenoi assuming the highest ranks in the imperial administration, the well-educated echelons of the society had to seek for imperial patronage to make for a living and the iambic insult conformed to a changed social setting. A product of such an altered social reality are the *Timarion* which lampoons Byzantine obsession with constant talking and uncontrolled consumption, hence the crude language of *iambos* was again adapted to the present social and political concerns.

At the same time, Byzantine iambic discourse broadened its imagery and adapted to the unquestionably Christian character of the society of the Empire. Although, its core features, including coarse imagery, crude physicality, appetitive ('feminine') bodily needs, interest in deformed, monstrous, sickly body are retained, in many places it is welded with the motifs taken from the Biblical and religious tradition which enrich the symbolic significance of the body and consumption. After all, gluttony and lust, which form the focus points of iambic discourse since the times of Archilochus and Hipponax, were perceived in Byzantium as deadly sins and iambic vituperation acquired, in many of its instances, strong Christian overtones.

Finally, such understood iambic discourse, based upon Ancient Greek tradition and endowed with overt Christian overtones was employed by the twelfth-century authors in their censure and lampooning of usurpers and tyrants. As I shall argue, various iambic elements are present in Choniates' imperial biography of the bloodiest tyrant in the history of the Empire, Andronikos I Komnenos. There, the iambically reconfigured consuming body, aggressive speech habits, combined with elements derived from the comic tradition form one of the most important features of Andronikos' literary portrayal. As I intend to prove, such iambic elements and symbolic uses of body and its parts are also identifiable in the accounts of the infamous coup of John Komnenos the Fat, written by Nicholas Mesarites and Niketas Choniates.

1.6. Overview of the Argument

The first chapter of the present thesis focuses on the two famous invectives composed by an eleventh-century polymath and author Michael Psellos: an iambic poem *In Sabbaitam* and an extremely interesting invective cast into the form of a religious hymn, *In Iacobum monachum*.

⁹⁸ BERNARD, *Writing and Reading* 253–290.

In this chapter I present an in-depth analysis of these texts elucidate how Psellos consciously engages with ancient comic tradition, employs the motifs characteristic of iambic discourse and casts them into Biblical terms, thereby mixing seemingly incompatible discourses. In the last section of this chapter I focus on the deeper function of such iambic/comic poetics within the performative literary society of the second half of the eleventh century (the aforementioned λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες).

In the second chapter I concentrate on the twelfth-century satirical tradition. Basing upon the anonymous twelfth-century satire, *Timarion*, I discuss an ancient motif which was widely spread in the Byzantine literary circles at that time, namely the equation of written and spoken word with the consumption of food. Indeed, *Timarion*, as was been noticed by numerous scholars, is a social satire in which most of the characters are utterly obsessed with speaking and eating.⁹⁹ The aim of this chapter is to exhibit how iambic/comic elements, such as focus on the mouth as a speaking/consuming organ (chiefly in the portrayal of Theodore of Smyrna), metonymic uses of food, comic materiality (catalogues of foodstuffs and dishes), were used by the anonymous author of the text and what deeper, symbolic function they play within the social context in which *Timarion* was produced.

The third chapter turns to one of the most important and experimentative pieces of Byzantine historiography, the *History* by Niketas Choniates. I contend that Choniates, who eye-witnessed the catastrophe of 1204 and had to flee to a voluntary exile in Nikaia, required new discursive schemes to pay due justice to the narrative of the fall of Constantinople and the reasons which led to it. As a result, he perceived comedy (κομῳδία) as an inherent feature of historiographic discourse and used it on a frequent basis to expose and lampoon inordinate behaviours persevered by the government officials and the emperors. The first part of the chapter centres on several comic episodes included by Choniates in his *History* which depict the gluttonous state officials: the above-mentioned John of Poutza, John Kamateros, as well as Constantine Mesopotamites and Theodore Kastamonites. The second section of this chapter presents and analyses a slightly different usage of iambic discourse in the narrative biography of Andronikos I Komnenos. Here the iambic elements focus on the metonymic uses of Andronikos' murderous Cyclopean jaws (γνάθοι). I contend that just as violent public speakers in the comic tradition, Andronikos is characterized not only by his uncontrollable and cruel speaking habits and his savage consumptive passions, as he is consistently portrayed (figuratively) consuming others with his all-devouring jaws.

The focal point of the final chapter are the accounts of the palace coup led by John Komnenos the Fat in 1200/01, which were written by Nicholas Mesarites, Niketas Choniates, Euthymios Tornikes and Nikephoros Chrysoberges. The chief aim of this chapter is to show how the fat body of the usurper and its symbolic meaning incited all authors to use and appropriate some of the most important features of iambic/comic aesthetics. These elements are introduced in numerous humorous episodes, in which John's fat body is comically reconfigured and reduced to its consumptive organs and bodily needs. Again, I argue that the episodes which form the focus points of analysis draw heavily on the Greek iambic/comic tradition. These elements function as a means for lampooning and satirizing socially unwanted behaviours, dehumanize and lampoon the usurper.

Finally, it must be stressed that my analysis offers insights into the selected examples which illustrate the versatility of the Byzantine 'iambic discourse' and how it was adapted by the Byzantine literati of the long twelfth century to voice their cultural, political and social

⁹⁹ For this see my discussion in chapter 2.

concerns. The literary material for such an analysis is much broader and the reader might find significant omissions which should be explained. I have not included an extended analysis of the *Ptochoprodomika* which serve only as a background of my discussion throughout the thesis. I have discovered myself unable to add any further value on top of Margaret Alexiou's vast work on many of the consumptive aspects of the *Ptochoprodomika*. Secondly, it must also be noted that I have consciously ignored analyzing depictions of consumption of 'barbaric' people which are explored in Byzantine 'ethnographic discourse.' I did so in the belief that it would be well beyond the scope of this thesis, and has already been more than sufficiently studied by Antony Kaldellis.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ A. KALDELLIS, *Ethnography After Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*. Philadelphia 2013.

2. THE LANGUAGE OF BYZANTINE IAMBIC INSULT: PSELLOS' *IN SABBAITAM* AND *IN IACOBUM*

The influence which the writings of Michael Psellos exerted on Byzantine authors of the twelfth century and later periods is undeniable. He belongs to a handful of Byzantine authors whose texts were quoted by his heirs as examples of the unmatched literary skills. It therefore seems logical to begin with his literary heritage, since it served as an inspiration and immediate model for many of the twelfth-century literati, and it opened many discourses which were continued under the Komnenoi and later.

Therefore, in this chapter I will focus on two invectives composed by Psellos: primarily on the *Against the Monk Jacob* (*In Iacobum monachum*), but I will begin with another invective poem by Psellos entitled *Against Sabbaites* (*In Sabbaitam*). They are of interest for several reasons. First, they exemplify the use of insulting talk of *iambos* within the performative context of the eleventh-century literary θέατρα in Constantinople. Secondly, both texts, as I shall attempt to show, are strongly grounded in the iambic/comic aesthetics and Aristophanic language of bodily excess. Thirdly, they explore all the persistent features of iambic discourse while at the same time illustrate how it was conformed to social, religious and political concerns of the late eleventh-century Byzantium.

To be sure, both invectives are, to use the words of a contemporary Polish comic artist, 'a piece of high aesthetic risk' and this is precisely owing to the frequent usage of iambic insults. For instance, Leo Sternbach, who published and commented on Psellos' invective against Sabbaites at the beginning of the twentieth century, castigated the author for "rudeness with which he scourges his opponents" in his "snappy pamphlets" and "surpassing all literary contemporaries in creeping servility and haughty arrogance."¹⁰¹ In a similar vein, Dölger called *In Iacobum* as "an aberration of good taste" (*Geschmacksverirrung*) and was surprised how a Byzantine author, living in society which (purportedly) treated abuse and cursing as taboo,¹⁰² could even conceive of composing anything which closely resembles such an invective. Even recently Maltese suggested that *In Iacobum* is rather "far from being a literary masterpiece."¹⁰³ Still other scholars feel compelled to defend Psellos against the allegations of blasphemous intents or irreverence towards a sanctified genre of the religious *kanon*.¹⁰⁴ But it is exactly the irreverence towards the genre and blasphemous intents, which make both pieces of Psellos' invective so thought-provoking.

I would like to contend that in order to fully grasp and appreciate the complex aesthetics of *In Iacobum* and *In Sabbaitam* they should be considered within their original

¹⁰¹ L. STERNBACH, "Ein Schmächgedicht des Michael Psellos," *Wiener Studien* I 1903, 10–39 at 10: "Einen seltsamen Gegensatz zu den schwülstigen Enkomien auf hochgestellte Gönner bildet die rücksichtslose Derbheit, mit der Psellos seine Gegner und Neider in bissigen Pamphleten geißelt. Als würdiger Repräsentant seiner Zeit übertrifft er alle literarischen Zeitgenossen in kriechendem Servilismus und hoffärtigem Übermut."

¹⁰² F. DÖLGER, "Byzantinische Satire und byzantinische Kultur" *Geistige Arbeit* 6.12 (1939) 5 called it "an aberration of good taste" (*Geschmacksverirrung*).

¹⁰³ E. MALTESE, "Osservazioni sul carme «Contro il Sabbaita» di Michele Psello" in *Atti del Convegno internazionale «La poesia tardoantica e medievale»*, Perugia, 15–16 novembre 2001, A. M. Taragna (ed.), Alessandria 2004, 207–214 at 207. As Ljubarskij's article indirectly proved, it is seemingly hard to establish which literary work is and which is not a masterpiece: J. LJUBARSKIJ, "Why Is the Alexiad a Masterpiece of Byzantine Literature?" in *Anna Komnene and Her Times*, T. Gouma-Peterson (ed.), New York 2000 169–185.

¹⁰⁴ These and other negative views were collected and quoted by H. EIDENEIER, *Spanos. Eine byzantinische Satire in der Form einer Parodie. Einleitung, kritischer Text, Kommentar und Glossar*. Berlin–New York 1977 54, n. 6 and 7.

social and cultural context, not from the distorted perspective of a ‘sanctified’ and seemingly ‘puritan’ society of the Byzantines. In his reappraisal of Psellos’ *In Sabbaitam*, Floris Bernard showed how the background of the eleventh-century λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες, in which well-educated literati competed with each other in performative settings of the θέατρα, adds to our understanding of eleventh-century poetics.¹⁰⁵ When considered from the perspective of its performative setting, Psellos’ *In Iacobum* turns out to be a highly innovative and experimental piece of literary invective. On the one hand, it fully conforms to the rules of the genre of *kanon*; and at the same time, it crosses and subverts its boundaries by introducing motifs specific to the ancient tradition of *iambos*. Moreover, while *In Sabbaitam* Psellos used overtly abusive and at times even rude terms, the language employed in *In Iacobum* are both “discrete and euphemistic” hence conforming to religious genre, while also iambically vivid and explicit.¹⁰⁶

It is the chief aim of the present chapter to show how lofty Christian elements and symbols are permeated with mundane iambic *topoi* in both invectives, with the emphasis on *In Iacobum*. Biblical figures and symbols are juxtaposed by Psellos with flagrant abuse, with insistence on the deformed and debased body as well as repulsive physiology. This dialogic juggling of the sacred and the profane, de-sanctification of the sacred and sanctification of the mundane, lie at the core of Psellos’ literary technique here, while the aggressive insult of *iambos* serves on the one hand to utterly denigrate and laugh down the literary opponent, while on the other, to expose those behaviors which are socially unacceptable and threatening.

2.1. *Iambos and the Iambic Body in the In Sabbaitam*

To be sure, Psellos overtly admits that he was deeply aware of how the iambic/comic imagery worked and what its functions were.¹⁰⁷ At the very end of *In Sabbaitam*, a lengthy piece of aggressive verbal abuse against his competitor in the literary ἀγών, Psellos explicitly states that Sabbaites brought laughter to his iambic verses:¹⁰⁸

Alas! Against whom do I write my iambs?

¹⁰⁵ Chiefly in the case of *In Sabbaitam*: BERNARD, *Writing and Reading* 266–290. For the context see the studies in GRÜNBART (ed.), *Theatron*.

¹⁰⁶ The tradition of discrete and euphemistic abuse in the Bible was discussed by J. F. HULTIN, *The Ethics of Obscene Speech in Early Christianity and Its Environment*. Leiden–Boston 2008, 114–118. I shall discuss this feature of Psellos’ poem at greater length in the further section of the article. While the presence of motifs drawn from ancient Greek literature is unquestionable, majority of the previous studies focus rather on religious form and content of the poem. Conca analysed some of the literary allusions to the Biblical tradition as well as patristic treatises which are present in the poem: F. CONCA, “La lingua e lo stile dei carmi satirici di Psello (*Contro il Sabbaita; Contro il monaco Iacopo*),” *Eikasmos* XII 2001, 187–196 at: 193–196. Only Anagnostakis and Papamatsorakis have discussed some of the pagan *topoi*, such as Dionysiac revelries, and their connection to the biblical person of Noah: I. ANAGNOSTAKIS–T. PAPAMATSORAKIS, “Ἐκμανὴς νέος Βάκχος. The Drunkenness of Noah in Medieval Art”, in *To Βυζάντιο ὥριμο για αλλαγές. Επιλογές, ευαισθησίες και τρόποι έκφρασης από τον ενδέκατο στον δέκατο πέμπτο αιώνα*, Angelidi C.G. (ed.), Athens 2004, 209–256, at 231–233. Also see R. Romano, *La satira bizantina dei secoli XI–XV*. Torino 1999, 198–215, I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, Οἶνος ὁ Βυζαντινός. Ἡ ἄμπελος καὶ ὁ οἶνος στὴ βυζαντινὴ ποίηση καὶ ὑμνογραφία. Athens 1995, 32–41, which includes a modern Greek translation of the text, however some parts of it have been left out.

¹⁰⁷ E. MALTESE, “Osservazioni.” For similar earlier instances of such exchanges of invective see E. van Opstall, “The pleasure of mudslinging: an invective dialogue in verse from 10th century Byzantium” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 108.2 (2015) 771–796 and Constantine of Rhodes’ exchange of iambic invective with Theodore Paphlagon in P. MATRANGA, *Anecdota Graeca* I. Rome 1850, 627–632.

¹⁰⁸ Bernard, *Writing and Reading* 285 called it: “stupefying stream of abuse and insults.”

What kind of outrage would match your nature?
 What jest would match your life?
 Defilement of my tongue, for what else will I accomplish?
 And will I bring an unhappy comedy
 If I myself examine his life now?
 I who at least spare the demons in my words,
 I brought Sabbaites to my playful verses
 Having rubbed the mat below your foot.
 How could I praise him in exalting terms,
 and bring laughter to my iambic verses?
 For Thersites, if he lived,
 would not disown Calliope for
 mocking him in melodic verses,
 but would show fondness for comedy.¹⁰⁹

It is hence safe to state that Psellos consciously follows the literary tradition which dates to mythical Iambe. The poem includes all the features of the iambic discourse which been singled out by Worman. Just as we will see in *In Iacobum*, the performative setting, characteristic of *iambos*, permeates the entire piece. After all, it is an extended literary response to a witty epigram, which mocked Psellos' failed sojourn to monastic life.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, in line with the functions of *iambos*, Psellos defames his opponent chiefly through exhibiting that he outclasses him in terms of poetical skills and intellectual refinement. Moreover, following the corrective function of iambic discourse, Psellos exposes Sabbaites as a dangerous type who needs to be cast outside of society: most probably, he held the function of *ptochotrophos*, an official who was responsible for the poor in the monastery of Olympos, but he does not seem to have performed his duties correctly.¹¹¹

Similarly to Greek iambic poetry, or Greek comedy, the mouth and its parts become the object of focus of the insult. Sabbaites' mouth babbles idle blasphemies from his confounded mind, his tongue is filled with measureless dung, his puffed-up jaws can only produce "nasty little words", he is garrulous, slanderous and slow-tongued.¹¹² His verbal habits (as will be the case with the tyrant Andronikos in Choniates' *History*) are equated to that of dog, an animal which in iambic tradition was associated with loud and foul speech:

Not carrying godliness on his countenance
 Nor [even] appearance of piety or august manners,
 But like a shameless and abominable dog,
 You move shamelessly your murderous legs

¹⁰⁹ All English translations from Psellos are mine, unless noted otherwise.

¹¹⁰ BERNARD, *Writing and Reading* 279 discusses the relationship of the epigram to both invectives and provides a plausible dating for the composition of both pieces: *In Sabbaitam* must have been penned after Psellos returned to Constantinople in 1055, while *In Iacobum* might have been composed earlier than this and is a response to a different poetical work that was targeted against Psellos.

¹¹¹ BERNARD, *Writing and Reading* 282; WESTERINK (ed.), *Poemata* 258: "Huius Sabbaitae, qui olim ut videtur monachus fuerat monasterii s. Sabae Hierosolymis, tunc autem cuiusdam monasterii in Olympo Bithynico siti ptochotrophus erat." Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 29: καὶ τῶν πενήτων προστάτης δεδαιγμένος.

¹¹² Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 82–83: καὶ πεφράχθω σοι στόμα βλάσφημα ληροῦν ἐκ φρενῶν πεφυρμένων, 86: ὦ κοπρίας γέμουσα γλῶσσα μυρίας, 142 γλώσσαλγε (garrulous) καὶ ψίθυρε (slanderous) καὶ ψυχοκτόνε (slaying the soul) 163–4 φύσις δὲ πλήρης πνευματουμένων γνάθων γλωττοκρότων τε τεχνῖτα λεξειδίων, 223 βραδύγλωσσοι φύσει.

And vomit your tongue filled with blasphemy.¹¹³

Such violent speechifying forms one of the important themes of Psellos' vitriolic attack: Sabbaites' speech is univocally linked with aggressive and boorish behavioral patterns. His mouth produces blasphemy (βλασφημία), insults (λοιδορία), babbling (ληρία), foolish talk (φλυαρία), outspokenness (παρρησία) reproaches (ἔλεγχος) and Thersitean nature.¹¹⁴ Interestingly enough, the last term, ἔλεγχος, links Sabbaites to the yapping sophistic type known to us, for instance, from Aristophanic *Clouds*. In striking similarity to iambic sophist, Sabbaites is mocked for his rusticity, excessive production of idle talk, lack of poetic skill and any significant education whatsoever:

You are deprived of the knowledge of better things,
and you have not received more advanced education,
you creature full of puffy cheeks,
technician of resonant little words!
Novel orator, suddenly sprung from the earth,
lacking skills in invention and styles,
but most experienced in ambiguous *staseis*
and skilled in both ideas and phrasing.
In invective and commonplace
you are ready and enthusiastic, being all gurgles;
yet in the figures of encomium you are incompetent!¹¹⁵

Bernard pointed out several interesting features of these lines: by a frequent reference to “puffed up” cheeks (or rather jaws, which probably point to his beastly nature: πνευματουμένων γνάθων)¹¹⁶ and gurgling (καχλάζων), Psellos exposes a complete poetic incompetence of Sabbaites. An uneducated babbler that he is, the best what he can achieve is to devise his “nasty little words,”¹¹⁷ or “ambiguous *staseis*” which no one would even understand.¹¹⁸ The idle chatter, which he vomits through his tongue is so violent that it seems to have the capacity to kill:

Oh tongue, which knows murderous expressions,
agitator of the people, provoker of uproar amongst the crowd,
fingers which harm like arrows,
arms which strike heavier than a spear,

¹¹³ Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 24–28: οὐδὲ πρόσωπον εὐσεβείας εἰσφέρων / οὐδ' εὐλαβείας σχῆμα καὶ σεμνοῦ τρόπου, / ἀλλ' ὡς ἀναιδὴς καὶ κατάπτυστος κύων / κινεῖς ἀναιδῶς τοὺς φονοδόρους πόδας, / χεῖρες δὲ γλῶτταν ἔμπλεων βλασφημίας. On dog-imagery and Thersites see my discussion of Andronikos in chapter 3.

¹¹⁴ Βλασφημία: *In Sabbaitam* v. 20, 36, 64; ἔλεγχος v. 28, 83, 129, λοιδορία v. 269 ληρία and φλυαρία v. 89, 285, παρρησία 268, 226. On παρρησία as an unwanted feature leading straight to laughter see Barsanuphios *Letter* 458 and Cassia's *Epigram* A, 150–160.

¹¹⁵ Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 160–170: ὃ γνώσεως ἄμοιρε τῆς τῶν κρειττόνων, / μαθημάτων ἄδεκτε τῶν σοφωτέρων, / φύσις δὲ πλήρης πνευματουμένων γνάθων / γλωττοκρότων τε τεχνῖτα λεξειδίων· / ὃ καινὲ ρῆτορ, γῆθεν ἐκφύς ἀθρόον, / τὰς εὐρέσεις ἄτεχνε καὶ τὰς ιδέας, / τὰς δὲ στάσεις ἔντεχνε τὰς ἀμφιρρόπους / καὶ δεινὴ τὴν ἔννοιαν ἢ καὶ τὴν φράσιν· / ὃ πρὸς καταδρομὴν μὲν ἢ κοινὸν τόπον / θερμουργὲ καὶ πρόχειρε, καχλάζων ὅλος, / τοὺς δὲ τρόπους ἄτεχνε τῶν ἐγκωμίων. English translation by Bernard 285–286. The literary incompetence is otherwise a wide-spread *topos* cf. the later lucianic satire by John Katrares. For the discussion and the relevant bibliography on the subject see P. MARCINIAK, “Reinventing Lucian in Byzantium” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 70 (2016) 209–224 at: 219 n. 81.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Theodore's of Smyrna sophistic στωμυλία which I am discussing the second chapter of the thesis.

¹¹⁷ Cf. the portrayal of John Kamateros, which I discuss in the chapter 3.

¹¹⁸ Bernard pointed out that Psellos is referring here to Hermogenes' rhetorical theory, suggesting that Sabbaites does not know it.

pen which cuts into the hearts of many,
and ink, which inscribes a black lawsuit!¹¹⁹

Therefore, Sabbaites uses his tongue in an utterly wrong way. Not only does he fill it with murderous expressions or agitates the crowds with his own words, his behavior runs counter to both the ethical and literary standards; thence the mentions of his arms, pen and ink. In addition, it is hard to escape noticing parallels between the presentation of Sabbaites and the character of Cleon which prevails as a literary character in Aristophanic comedies which were composed by the playwright in 420's.¹²⁰ As Worman put it, Cleon (hence the infamous Paphlagon from the Aristophanic *Knights*) can easily be labelled as a "loud-mouthed consumer" an "open-mouthed violent monster." The iambic image of yawning jaws and mouth is explored by Aristophanes as metonyms of his political ineptness, voraciousness and greediness. For instance, in *Knights*, the Leader of the Chorus cries out for help against the violent Paphlagon:

Strike, strike the villain, who has spread confusion amongst the ranks of the Knights, this public robber, this yawning gulf of plunder, this devouring Charybdis, this villain, this villain, this villain!¹²¹

Essentially, both Sabbaites and Cleon share similar features: they revel in producing violent abuse, they meddle with people, disrupting social order and are gluttonous monsters, who eat up public funds. Surely, just like comic Paphlagon, Sabbaites is a voracious beast who consumes the poor, while pretending to take care of them:

Don't wear out the threadbare cloak and defile me,
Strike quickly, you dog, with your shoulder-strap.¹²²
Tell me, what do you have in common with a wolf in sheepskin?
Apart from the skin, the falsity of your costume.
You pretend before the poor, whom you devour.
The beast within, you truly turned out to be a beast.¹²³

Let us discuss several interesting aspects of this short excerpt. Firstly, the 'threadbare cloak' which Psellos mentions here is a clear pun on comic tradition, which highlights Sabbaites' greediness. As *Suda* explains, the τρίβων was a ragged cloak worn by philosophers in the winter, who suffered from cold and had nothing to eat. The author glosses the entry with a quotation from Aristophanic *Clouds*, which refer to bizarre feasting habits of stupid philosophers.¹²⁴ The term that Psellos applies here points to the rapacious nature of

¹¹⁹ Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 171–175: ὦ γλῶσσα τὴν σφάπτουσας εἰδυῖα φράσιν, / δῆμων ἀνάπτα, λαομουλτοσυστάτα· / ὦ δάκτυλοι πλήττοντες οἵαπερ βέλη / καὶ βραχίων δόρατος εἰσβάλλων πλέον / καὶ καλαμὶς τέμνουσα πολλῶν καρδίας. English translation by Bernard, *Writing and Reading* 289.

¹²⁰ Cf. a similar discussion regarding John Kamateros in ch. 3.

¹²¹ Aristophanes, *Knights* 247–249: παῖε παῖε τὸν πανοῦργον καὶ ταραξιπόστρατον καὶ τελώνην καὶ φάραγγα καὶ Χάρυβδιν ἀρπαγῆς, καὶ πανοῦργον καὶ πανοῦργον. Cf. Psellos *In Sabbaitam* 185: ἀκοῦργε καὶ πανοῦργε, δεινὲ τὰς φρένας and 110: Χαρύβδεως πρόσωπον, εἶδος Γοργόνης

¹²² The ἐπωμίς mentioned here traditionally refers to a strap with which women fastened their tunics, for this see *LSJ*, which is probably another playful pun on Sabbaites' effeminacy.

¹²³ Psellos *In Sabbaitam* 300–306: μὴ τρίβε τὸν τρίβωνα καὶ μίαινέ μοι· / ῥῖψον, κύον, τάχιστα τὴν ἐπωμίδα. / τί κοινόν, εἰπέ, τῷ λύκῳ καὶ κωδίῳ; / ἐκτὸς τὸ χρῶμα, ζωγραφούντων ἢ πλάσις. / πρόσχημά σοι πένητες, οὐς κατεσθίεις· / θῆρ ἔνδοθεν, θῆρ ἀκριβῶς ἐφωράθης.

¹²⁴ *Suda* τ 954: Τρίβωνα: στολισμόν. οἱ γὰρ φιλόσοφοι ἐν τῷ τρίβωνι ἐχειμάζον, μηδὲν ἐσθίοντες. καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης: μήτε ῥιγῶν ἀπέχθη λίαν μήτ' ἀριστᾶν ἐπιθυμῆς, οἴνου τ' ἀπέχη καὶ γυμνασίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνοήτων. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 416–7. This presentation shares, at the same time, a lot of features with Lucianic portrayals of idle and babbling philosophers, for some examples see K. SCHLAPBACH, "The logoi of Philosophers in Lucian of Samosata" *Classical Antiquity* 29.2 (2010), 250–277.

Sabbaites: his behavior stands in stark contrast to the office which he holds and instead of taking care of the poor, he lives at their very expense. Both animals, which are mentioned here functioned in iambic tradition as insult. To call someone a ‘dog’ was a traditional feature of what Parker labelled as a ‘discourse of reproach’ in the iambic tradition, while wolf functioned as a degrading epithet of homosexuals. Certainly, Psellos explicitly calls Sabbaites a hermaphrodite and a pathic (97: ἐρμαφροδίτε καὶ πλέον θηλυδρία, 91: πάντολμε καὶ κίναϊδε, ῥέκτα κρυφίων).¹²⁵ At the same time, Psellos mingles the iambic insult with Biblical overtones: the wolf in a sheep’s skin is an overt allusion to Matthew 7:15, well-known words of Jesus, in which he likens the false prophets to voracious wolves. Certainly, this pun could not have escaped the audience of the invective, especially if we consider the fact that Sabbaites is at least in a number of verses linked to the idea of ‘false prophet.’¹²⁶

The ungodly and voracious character of Sabbaites is moreover emphasized by multiple references to his monstrous and animal guises. In line with the literary mechanisms of *iambos* his body is constantly reconfigured, transmogrified and dismembered. It is hard to list all the beastly/monstrous guises of Sabbaites in the poem, but let me list just a few of them. At times, he is presented as a gluttonous ox (18: ἀδδηφαγος βοῦς, another neat pun on Sabbaites’ boorishness); a savage beast filled with poison (180 ἰοῦ γέμων θήρ, or a bitter beast 177: πικρὸν θηρίον); assumes the countenance of the Erinys (205 Ἑρινύος πρόσωπον). At times Psellos bursts with elaborate lists of monstrous appearance of Sabbaites:

O dung-beetle, leech¹²⁷ or chameleon,
O crone Erinys, the cause of all misfortunes,
O the creature of the night, o concealed witch.
Filling houses with smoke and despair,
A villain and a knave of fearful mind.
O, offspring of Satan, demonic nature,
Telchin, Typhon, Priapus, the goddess of Satires,
Titan, Prometheus and possessed by Coryba;
Worse than Iapetos and greater than Kronos.¹²⁸

Such a grotesque monstrosity clearly points to all vices of Sabbaites: he is a sinner, guilty of idolatry, fornication, gluttony and every conceivable sinful behavior. These are further enforced by two vivid references the κανθαρίς and the βδέλλιον. The first term is an overt reference to the dung-beetle, who voraciously consumes the cakes kneaded with excrement in Aristophanes’ *Peace*. As I shall show see below, Sabbaites is just as well full of

¹²⁵ *LSJ* notes that the insult could easily be translated as ‘you bitch!’. For λύκος see *LSJ* as well. Also, as *Suda* λ 818 notes, the wolves were linked to babbling characters (just as the dogs).

¹²⁶ Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 190–193: Ὁ μυσταγωγὲ Δελφικῶν θεσπισμάτων, ἀρρητοποιεῖ Πυθικῶν μυστηρίων· ὧ μάντι δεινῶν, ὧ προφῆτα χειρόνων, cf. v. 201–203.

¹²⁷ *Suda* β 197: Βδέλλα: ὁ Σολομών φησι: τῇ βδέλλῃ ἦσαν γ’ θυγατέρες ἀγαπήσει ἀγαπώμεναι: καὶ αἱ γ’ αὐταὶ οὐκ ἐνεπίπλαντο, καὶ ἡ δὲ οὐκ ἠρκέσθη εἰπεῖν ἱκανή. βδέλλα ἡ ἀμαρτία. θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς πορνεία, φθόνος, εἰδωλολατρία, αἱ οὐκ ἐπίπλανται διὰ τῶν ἀτόπων πράξεων. ἡ δ’ ἡ πονηρὰ ἐπιθυμία.

¹²⁸ Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 181–188: ὧ κανθαρίς, βδέλλιον ἢ χαμαιλέον / ὧ γραῦς Ἑρινύς, συμφορῶν παραιτία, / ὧ νυκτιτυμβάς, φαρμακὶς κεκρυμμένη, / οἴκου καπνοῦ πληροῦσα καὶ δυσθυμίας, / κακοῦργε καὶ πανοῦργε, δεινὲ τὰς φρένας· / ὧ τοῦ σατὰν γέννημα, δαιμόνων φύσις, / Τελχίν, Τυφών, Πρίαπε, Σατύρου θεά, / Τιτάν, Προμηθεῦ καὶ Κορύβα μητρίσας, / Ἰαπετοῦ πρώτιστε καὶ Κρόνου πλέον.

all kinds of filth.¹²⁹ The leech (βδέλλιον or βδέλλα) is actually a pun on the Biblical tradition and refers to *Proverbs*,¹³⁰ and is also glossed over in *Suda*:

Solomon says: “*The leech had 3 daughters*,” which he loved dearly; and [all] three of them were not satisfied to the full, while the fourth one was not capable of saying “I’ve had enough!” Sin [is called] a leech. Her daughter[s] [are] harlotry, envy, idolatry, which are not satisfied by means their bizarre practices. The fourth one is base desire.

Both words encapsulate well the evil nature of Sabbaites, by playing with both iambic *topoi* and openly Christian overtones.

The utterly inhuman and dangerous nature of Sabbaites is underscored by Psellos by repeatedly connecting the target of his insult with filth:¹³¹ another standard trait of iambic abuse.¹³² Sabbaites’ foul verbal and aggressive speechifying is projected as well on the sphere of the bowels: just as his tongue is full of dung, his belly is filled with litter; it “throbs at gourmandizing”.¹³³ Being like a gut-in itself (αυτόχρομα κοιλία), Sabbaites is completely lifeless/insentient except in matters of wantonness and his bowels (ἄψυχε πάντα πλὴν τρυφῆς καὶ κοιλία).

It is interesting to note how Psellos manages to combine aggressive and foolish babbling, the animality, the belly and effeminacy, all of which we encounter in *In Iacobum* as well):

O tongue filled with countless dung,
O swinish nature filled with mirth,
O fearful heart full of foul smell,
O babbler and yapper, vicious slanderer,
O slave of the belly filled with litter,
O shameless catamite, who conceals his doings,
O abomination of all hidden carnal pleasure,
O gingerbread rhetor, worse than Mud-Plato.¹³⁴

Without a doubt, the excerpt is a very good example of the crude aesthetics of iambic discourse and it illustrates very well all the features and patterns of iambic insult. The dung, filth and foul smell stand as vivid metonyms for Sabbaites’ foolish and excessive speech: his nasty little words are of no more worth than the dung he is filled with. Worman explored at length how the inappropriate uses of mouth and tongue (violent/excessive speechifying) bears effeminizing effects on the body. Surely, Psellos employs such a motif in the excerpt quoted above: the exorbitant babbling turned Sabbaites into an effeminate catamite, who

¹²⁹ Aristophanes, *Peace* 1–42. The very same image is referred to by Choniates in his portrayal of gluttonous John of Routs and John Kamateros, as I argue in chapter 2. Cf. Prodromos, *Carmina Historica* 59.204–212: ὦ βορβορώδης καὶ δυσσομίας λόγος, / ὅποῖος ἐκπέφευγε τῶν σῶν χειλέων. / ὦ κόπρος, οἷα σῶν ὀδόντων ἐξέβη. ὦ καπνός, οἷος σῶν ἀπεπνεύσθη γνάθων. / ὄντως σὺ ταύτης ἄξιος τῆς εὐθύνης· / οὐκ ἐκ μόνης γλώσσης γὰρ ἡ βλασφημία, / ἐκ τῆς περισσείας δὲ τῆς σῆς καρδίας. / σὺ κλήσεως ἄξιος, ἥς ἐμὲ κρίνεις, / εἰδωλολατρῶν ἐκ φιλαργύρου τρόπου.

¹³⁰ *Proverbs* 30:15: “The leech has two daughters. ‘Give! Give!’ they cry. “There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, ‘Enough!’

¹³¹ For this see my discussion of the physical features of John Komnenos the Fat in ch. 4.

¹³² This is ver well in line with Haidt’s discussion of disgust as a moral emotion.

¹³³ Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 90: ὦ γαστρὸς ἥττον, συρφετοῦ πεπλησμένη; 132 ὦ κοιλία σφύζουσα πρὸς λαιμαργίαν.

¹³⁴ Psellos *In Sabbaitam* 86–93: ὦ κοπρίας γέμουσα γλῶσσα μυρίας, / ὦ βορβόρου πλήθουσα χοιρώδης φύσις, / δυσωδίας γέμουσα δεινὴ καρδία, / ὦ λῆρε καὶ φλύαρε, βάσκανε πλέον, / ὦ γαστρὸς ἥττον, συρφετοῦ πεπλησμένη, / πάντολμε καὶ κίναιδε, ῥέκτα κρυφίων, / βδέλυγμα σαρκὸς ἡδονῶν κεκρυμμένων, / κρίθινε ῥήτορ καὶ πλέον Πηλοπλάτων.

enjoys all the sinful carnal pleasure and has lost ‘manly’ reasoning capacity. For this very reason, Sabbaites is even worse than Mud-Plato, a nickname which clung to a sophist Alexander, famous for his luxurious way of living, profligacy, effeminacy and a producer of needless extempore speeches (thence the derisive nickname, which points to the worthless sophistic words uttered by his mouth).¹³⁵

2.2. In Iacobum: *Subverting the Kanon with Γαστήρ*

With all these in mind, let us turn to *In Iacobum*, which presents a different kind of invective, where the similarly crude iambic imagery is voiced in more subtle terms and in a completely different poetic form of religious kanon which is wittily subverted by Psellos. Certainly, on the surface, Psellos follows all of the formal generic rules of the *kanon* to the letter.¹³⁶ *In Iacobum* consists of traditional eight odes, each containing 4–6 stanzas (*troparia*), composed after the pattern of eight *hirmoi*, which set the rhythmic and formal pattern for each and every ode. Eideneier also noticed that 17 out of 32 stanzas begin with expressions drawn from the hymnographic literature.¹³⁷ All stanzas are linked to each other by means of an acrostic. In addition, at first glance the poem retains the traditional content expected of every *kanon*: it seems to be a hymn of praise. Throughout the text there are numerous expressions which appear to signal glorification.¹³⁸ Conventional context of feast and celebration seem to be retained as well: the first and the last stanza openly mention the festive setting of the *kanon*: there is dance (χόρος), festival (πανήγυρις), festive noises (κρότοι), and garlanding: στέφανους ... σὴ κορυφῇ ἐπιθήσωμεν. Finally, as Wellesz remarked, every composer of *kanones* was expected to refer to their original scriptural models, namely the nine Biblical canticles and Psellos follows this precept without any fail.

But, if the *kanones* were, as Wellesz put it, “... hymns of praise in an exultant eschatological mood, expressing dogmatic ideas ... [which] produce in the listeners a mystical mood ... intensified by the solemnity of the ritual”,¹³⁹ then *In Iacobum* is exactly what a religious *kanon* should not be—instead of eschatology and mystery, the reader/listener ‘participates’ in drunken feats of an inebriated monk. Despite that on the surface level liturgical elements are maintained, the aesthetics of the poem are explicitly mundane and Rabelaisian—the original sanctified context of the *kanon* has been turned upside down.¹⁴⁰ Instead of the expected glorification, *In Iacobum* is in fact an extended outburst of ‘parodic praise,’ and Psellos carefully plays here with what Roilos called a “protean character” of praise

¹³⁵ The story of his life was written down by Philostratus of Athens, *Lives of the Sophists* 5. On top of identifiable Aristophanic overtones, it is highly possible that Psellos transfers the motif of a phalse philosopher onto a Byzantine monk. On the discussion of false philosopher in Lucian see J. KUCHARSKI–P. MARCINIAK, “The beard and its philosopher: Theodore Prodromos on the philosopher’s beard in Byzantium” *BMGS* 41.1 (2017) 45–54.

¹³⁶ For the history of genre and formal aspects of the *kanon* see E. WELLESZ, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*. Oxford 1962 198–245; also in *ODB* II 1102.

¹³⁷ EIDENEIER, *Spanos* 53.

¹³⁸ These are: θαυμάτων πέρα ὁ καλὸς Ἰάκωβος (v. 9) Ἰωνας μεῖζων ... ἐφ’ ἡμῖν γέγονας (v. 29) ὁ πάντιμος (v. 44) πάνσοφε (v. 99); ὥφθης κανὼν καὶ τύπος, πάτερ (v. 97); ὥριμος βότρυς πέφυκεν ἡ σὴ ὄψις, Ἰάκωβε (v. 113); ὡς οἰκονόμος πάνσοφος νουνεχὴς τε καὶ φρόνιμος (v. 125); ὡ ξένων θαυμασίων (v. 130) τάς τάξεις τῶν ἀγγέλων ἐν οὐρανῷ, ἐπὶ γῆς δὲ ἐκπλήττεις ἀνθρώπων ψυχάς (v. 143–144).

¹³⁹ WELLESZ, *Byzantine Music* 199. Stress mine.

¹⁴⁰ Even the acrostich defies tradition commenced by Romanos Melodos: ‘I, Constantine, rhythmically celebrate drunk Jacob’: Μέθυσον Ἰάκωβον εὐρύθυμος ἄδω, Κώνστας. M. BACHTIN, *Rabelais and His World*. (transl. by H. Iswolsky). Bloomington 1984. For more on the Rabelaisian imagery in twelfth-century Byzantium see chapter 4.

and invective.¹⁴¹ This is achieved chiefly through the use and conscious abuse of traditional themes and motifs.

Jacob, just as Sabbaites, is characterized mainly in terms of his insatiable belly, which constitutes one of the leitmotifs of the poem. Throughout the poem's 160 verses γαστήρ (belly) is mentioned as many as four times, στόμαχος (stomach) thrice, κοιλία (gut) twice and it is consistently compared to a wine-vat (ληνός), wine-jar (πίθος), gutter (σωλήν) and, finally, wineskin (ἄσκός). Contrary to expectations, Jacob is praised by Psellos not for achieving ascetic virtues, but for wallowing in luxury and carnal sins. Moreover, in order to defame Jacob, Psellos plays with abundant and ambivalent (ancient Greek and Christian) symbolism of wine, wineskin, tears and baptism, cautiously presents Jacob as a direct opposite of his biblical types (Noah, Jonah, Azarias), and introduces iambic imagery into the religious and 'solemn' genre.¹⁴²

The subverted form of the *kanon*, the iambic *topoi* and molding them in one with strictly Biblical are in fact all connected to the leitmotif of Psellos' invective against Jacob. Surely as Pucci and Bakker noticed in their studies the on the narrative structure of the *Odyssey* that representing any human activity in terms of the belly (γαστήρ) opens up a space for both parody and irony. What is extremely interesting, such a parodic mechanism introduced by Psellos by means of γαστήρ-motif, also happens to be one of the three essential traits of a comic discourse singled out by Hermogenes, which must have been very well known to Psellos.¹⁴³ Not coincidentally, as I will argue, two other mechanisms of comic discursive scheme are clearly present in *In Iacobum*, that is:

- a. Subverted expectations (τὸ παρὰ προσδοκίαν);
- b. The admixture of high and low subjects (τὸ ἐναντίας ποιεῖσθαι τὰς εἰκόνας τῇ φύσει τῶν πραγμάτων).¹⁴⁴

2.3. An Interlude: Some Reflections on Γαστήρ

As I have mentioned above, the belly stands as one of the most prominent motifs of Psellos invective against Jacob. Not only does it reinforce the main theme of the *kanon*, that is drunkenness of monk Jacob, but also it introduces discursive strategies characteristic of comic/iambic discourse. On top of these, the imagery related to γαστήρ channels and combines both ancient and Christian symbols and welds them closely together into an

¹⁴¹ ROILLOS, *Amphoteroglossia*. 30. Of course, in rhetorical tradition invective (ψόγος) was regarded to be a modality or a sub-type of panegyric (ἐγκώμιον), for this see e.g. John of Sardis, *Commentary* 26.16–19.

¹⁴² In all likelihood, Psellos was the founder of the genre of personal invective dressed in the form of a *kanon*, for this see EIDENEIER, *Spanos* 54–55. As both Bakker and Pucci argued, Odysseus' belly appears only within the so-called disguised 'beggar' phase, when the hero is consciously presented as an unheroic type and is a subject of his wife's suitors' ridicule. For this see BAKKER, *The Meaning of Meat*. Larisa Vilimonovic has recently suggested to me that from this perspective *In Iacobum* might be read as well as a school-piece, where Psellos shows how to subvert the traditional genre.

¹⁴³ Hermogenes, *On the Method* 34.1–4: Τοῦ κωμικῶς λέγειν ἅμα καὶ σκώπτειν ἀρχαίως τρεῖς μέθοδοι· τὸ κατὰ παρωδίαν σχῆμα, τὸ παρὰ προσδοκίαν, τὸ ἐναντίας ποιεῖσθαι τὰς εἰκόνας τῇ φύσει τῶν πραγμάτων. For an insightful discussion of Hermogenes' theory on the comic and its application to Byzantine literature see A. PIZZONE, "Towards a Byzantine Theory of the Comic" in D. CAIRNS, M. ALEXIOU (eds.) *Greek Laughter and Tears*. Edinburgh 2017, 146–165. Of course, Psellos knew Hermogenes, since he produced a synopsis of his treatise *On (Rhetorical) Forms*. This was discussed by S. PAPAIOANNOU, "Synopsis of the Rhetorical Forms based on Hermogenes' *On Forms*," in *Michael Psellos on Literature and Art*, S. Papaioannou–Ch. Barber (eds.), Notre Dame 2017, 20–30.

¹⁴⁴ For these in Byzantine context see PIZZONE, "Towards a Byzantine Theory."

intricate web of meanings. To use other words, the motif of γαστήρ in Psellos' *In Iacobum* appropriates literary and representational features of iambic/comic discourse to the form and content of a religious canon.

If we turn closer attention to the text itself, it becomes clear that the motif of the belly, alongside Dionysiac festivities, is a compositional frame of the entire piece. Thus, the first strophe of the first ode enlists what the feast in the name Jacob comes down to: drunkenness, carousals, jokes, dances, singing, playing on the cymbals,¹⁴⁵ lasciviousness and the guts (κουιλία) filled with wine-jars. Whereas the penultimate strophe of the last ode is a lexical and play on the homophony of the nouns ἄσκος and ἄσκησις: Jacob has turned out to be a real ἄσκητής, because he has emptied so many wineskins (ἄσκοί) throughout his life. Indeed, as we learn earlier in the text of the invective, Jacob has brought his body into perfection, by transforming it into a wineskin which can never be filled to the full: νέον ἄσκον εὐμήχανον ἀπειργάσω τὸ σῶμά σου (131). Hence, the γαστήρ motif completely subverts the traditional context of the *kanon*: instead of celebrating a feast of a saint, Psellos paints a vivid picture of a drunken Dionysiac festivity.

These frequent references to the belly allows Psellos to introduce a vast array of connotations which were connected to γαστήρ. To be sure, the belly has been perceived as a dangerous space/organ since the very dawn of Greek literary tradition. The exacting, greedy and speechifying kings of the archaic iambic poetry are all characterized through their bellies. It is by no means an accident that Hipponax chose to begin his mock-epic with a word that he most probably invented, namely ἐγγαστριμαχαίρα, hence to a politician who “wields a knife in his belly,” hence pointing to his unrestrained and aggressive consumption, he does not even have to chop the consumed foodstuffs:

Tell me, Muse, of the sea swallowing, the stomach Carving of Eurymedontiades
who eats in no orderly manner, so that through a baneful vote determined by
the people he may die a wretched death along the shore of the undraining sea
...¹⁴⁶

The passage reveals vividly the close linkage between the insatiable γαστήρ, the unruly eating habits (ἐσθίει οὐ κατὰ κόσμον) and the social threat. This interconnection of the uncontrolled belly and danger is visible in the fact that the ones like Eurymedontiades, who was decreed to be stoned to death in the archaic Athens were those public officials who have abused the people for their own use: the tyrants, the fraudulent generals and the traitors of the πόλις, hence all those, who threatened the social order and stability of the city.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, in the Athenian Old Comedy the inability to curb belly and its insatiable urges were used as an emblem of the manipulative and parsimonious demagogues who were living at the expense of the people. For this reason, the costumes worn by the comic actors included a padded protruding belly, which pointed to its uncivic character, since it indicated slackness,

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Vita Basilii* 22.12–14 where the infamous Groullos and his retinue of mimes follow the melody of the holy chant whilst singing vulgar songs and playing on the cymbals “in the manner of Pan or Satyrs.”

¹⁴⁶ Hipponax, *Fragment* 128: Μοῦσά μοι Εὐρυμεδοντιάδεα, τὴν παντοχάρυβδιν, / τὴν ἐγγαστριμάχαιραν, ὃς ἐσθίει οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, ἔννεφ', / ὅπως ψηφίδι <κακός> κακὸν οἶτον ὀλεῖται / βουλῇ δημοσίῃ παρὰ θῖν' ἄλδος ἀτρυγέτοιο. The term was glossed by Hesychios, *Lexikon* ε 155: ἐγγαστριμάχαιραν· τὴν ἐν τῇ γαστρὶ κατατέμνουσαν (hence the one who consumes the edibles wholesome). The fragment was discussed by CH. G. BROWN, “Hipponax and Iambe,” *Hermes* 116.4 (1988) 478–481.

¹⁴⁷ WORMAN *Abusive Mouths*, 45–46.

effeminacy, and unrestrained appetites and hence pointed to lack of the civic control over their bodies.¹⁴⁸

I have already mentioned in the Introduction that the belly and its beastly needs stand at the core of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Pucci and Egbert showed that γαστήρ and concerns over orderly consumption form the leitmotifs of the *Odyssey*, which move its plot forward.¹⁴⁹ Thus, both Odysseus' companions, who consumed the forbidden meat of the Cattle of Helios and Penelope's suitors, who broke the divine of ξενία and were unlawfully filling their bellies with Odysseus' substance, had to be punished and killed; indeed, γαστήρ is characterized in the *Odyssey*, as an wretched thing, which causes many evil to men.¹⁵⁰ Correspondingly, the entire plot of the *Iliad* is triggered by belly-driven δημοβορία of Agamemnon, who exacts unjustly Briseis for himself and thereby prompts Achilles' anger (μῆνις).¹⁵¹ Agamemnon's private uncontrollable urges are mapped directly onto his public rapaciousness.

These ideas were further elaborated on and organized by Plato and Aristotle. In *Timaeus* Plato argues that gods placed the lowest part of the mortal soul in the belly (γαστήρ).¹⁵² As a result, it became the seat of beastly/feminine urges, which include the worst drive for bodily satisfaction. Since this nethermost part of the soul is responsible for the most basic, irrational, animal-like appetites (which include craving for food, drink and sex) Plato likens it to a savage beast (θρέμμα ἀγρίου).¹⁵³ Arguing along similar lines, Aristotle identifies in the *Nicomachean Ethics* taste and touch as brutish sensations which humans share with other animals.¹⁵⁴ The latter is even more pernicious than the sensation of taste: it is the act of touching food which gratifies a licentious person as it is seemingly close to sexual pleasure.¹⁵⁵ A man who takes enjoyment in these sensations is close to a wild animal and is characterized by savagery (θηριῶδες). Therefore gluttons, who are literally mad after their bellies (γαστριμάργοι), prove themselves to be the extremely crude types of humanity (ἀνδραποδώδεις). Indeed, such wariness towards γαστήρ is particular to every philosophical system of Greek antiquity. The Pythagoreans, with their elaborate rules which prohibited the intake of certain kinds of food are a particularly good case in point:¹⁵⁶ Pythagoras' idea of strict ἐγκρατεία entailed holding the belly in a constant check against its propensity towards luxury.¹⁵⁷ In the same vein, Philo Judaeus perceived the control over the belly, the genitals

¹⁴⁸ H. FOLEY, "The Comic Body in Greek Art and Drama" in B. Cohen (ed.), *Not the Classical Ideal. The Construction of the Other in Greek Art*. Leiden and Boston, 2000, 275–311, at 275.

¹⁴⁹ PUCCI, *Odysseus Polutropos*, 157–208; BAKKER, *The Meaning of Meat*, 135–156.

¹⁵⁰ Homer, *Odyssey* 17.473–474: γαστέρος εἵνεκα λυγρῆς, οὐλομένης, ἣ πολλὰ κάκ' ἀνθρώποισι δίδωσιν.

¹⁵¹ WORMAN *Abusive Mouths*, 29 points out that the δημοβορία, hence literally 'people eating,' of Agamemnon is driven directly by the urges of his own γαστήρ. For my discussion of iambic δημοβορία see chapter 3.

¹⁵² Plato, *Timaeus* 69c–70e. Certainly, Plato was profoundly inspired by Socrates who was purportedly the most self-controlled man towards the urges for sex, food and wine. For this see Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.1. Also see my discussion in LABUK, "Preliminary Remarks"

¹⁵³ As Plato argues further, it is for this reason that the gods decided to place it near the genitals, so that the belly as the seat of the most irrational passions is maximally distanced from the rational soul and does not interfere with it: Plato, *Timaeus* 69e. Plato perceives the belly as an ultimate source of immorality, irrationality, infirmity, and hence links it to effeminacy. See the discussion of these in HILL, *Eating to Excess*, 45–55.

¹⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1118a–b.

¹⁵⁵ In order to illustrate his point, Aristotle quotes story of a glutton who wished his neck was as long as crane's so that he might enjoy the sensation for a longer time, *Ibid.* 1118a.30–32.

¹⁵⁶ P. GARNSEY, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge 1999, 87–89; F. J. SIMOONS, *Plants of Life, Plants of Death*. Madison 1998, 192–210.

¹⁵⁷ Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 22.18–22.

and the tongue (an organ which consumes and produces speech) as the first and foremost concern of philosophy.¹⁵⁸

Such a conceptualization of the belly as a space associated with a threat both to the individual and to the society, became even stronger with the advent of Christianity. It seemed only natural that γαστήρ began to be associated with the deadly sins of gluttony, lust and greed and, by extension, with the Original Sin.¹⁵⁹ This can be clearly gleaned from the writings of the Greek Church fathers, which advocate for a rigorous ἔγκρατεία towards one's body and one's belly. It was through the maintenance of absolute control over one's σῶμα that one could live up to the ideal of a Christian. Indeed, living by one's own γαστήρ was believed to be an opposite of godly existence. Clements's of Alexandria famous discussion on gluttony in the *Paedagogus* is a case in point here. Without getting into details:¹⁶⁰ his ideas related to γαστήρ blend the webs of ideas associated with it in antiquity (hence foolishness, bestiality/animality, effeminacy, social danger) with the main tenets of Christianity. In Clements's eyes those, who live only by their bellies are closer in their resemblance to the savage beasts, for they leave only in order to satiate their beastly desires. Moreover, Clement links them to Satan, who himself was fashioned in Christian thought in the mold of a gluttonous beast. Hence uncontrolled belly, with its unquenchable desires, leads inevitably to sin and perdition of an individual.

It comes as no surprise that within Greek tradition, the spheres of the belly (γαστήρ) and the bowels (κοιλία, ἔντερα) were associated with pollution and socially/religiously unwanted elements. This can be gleaned for instance from Joseph Flavius' account of Herod's death in *the Jewish War*, who purportedly died because of intestinal inflammation. Similarly, in the well-known story in *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Socrates of Constantinople, Arius' intestines burst out after his dissimulated confession of Orthodox faith.¹⁶¹ This theme was appropriated and used by the later authors in Byzantium. Ungodly Lampoudios in the *Vita Euthymii patriarchae Constantinopolitani* died after being caught by a sudden spasm and

¹⁵⁸ Philo Judaeus, *De Congressu* 80.1–2. For the discussion of this see HULTIN, *The Ethics of Obscene Speech*, 78–81. The triad of talking, eating at lust is discussed by WORMAN *Abusive Mouths*, 275–318 in relation to Aristoteles and Theophrastus.

¹⁵⁹ Interestingly enough, the only extant Byzantine portrayal of gluttony was preserved in ms Vat. Gr. 394, which is an important witness to Climacus' Ladder of Divine Ascent. On the folio 74 r., gluttony is depicted as a classicizing figure of a richly clad woman, who wears a golden crown on head, and wields an apple in her left hand. She stares lasciviously at the figures of the monks in the illustration, who are being instructed by Climacus about her dangers. The apple which she holds in her left hand clearly points to the literally sinister character of the belly/gluttony, while the crown underscores the fact that the urges of the belly are the 'ruling passions' and the springboard of every sin. Finally, the extravagant attire of the personification of γαστριμαργία casts it into the role of a biblical whore (πορνή), hence a seditious, precarious, sinful and lascivious woman. The link between γαστριμαργία, threat and the original sin is rounded up by next illumination in the manuscript (fol. 78 r.), which portrays two scenes: in the first one we can see Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, who are standing near the apple tree, whereas in the second one they are being expelled from the Garden by an angel. The portrait was discussed by J.R. MARTIN, 1954, *The Illustration of The Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*. Princeton 1954, 68–69 and H. MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion: Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature*. Oxford 2012, 112. For the discussion of πορναί in Biblical tradition see K.L. GACA, "The Sexual and Social Dangers of Pornai in the Septuagint Greek stratum of patristic Christian Greek thought." in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium* L. James (ed.), Aldershot 1999, 35–40.

¹⁶⁰ For this see an in-depth analysis in HILL, *Eating to Excess*, 110–120.

¹⁶¹ Joseph Flavius, *The Jewish War* I.656–658. Arius' intestines supposedly burst out after his dissimulated confession of Orthodox faith, Socrates of Constantinople *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I.38.7. For the extensive discussion of the story see S. MUEHLBERGER: "The Legend of Arius' Death the Legend of Arius' Death: Imagination, Space and Filth in Late Ancient Historiography". *Past and Present* (2015) 227 (1): 3–29.

having vomited his excrements (which were mixed with his blood).¹⁶² A similar fate is shared in Psellos' *Chronographia* by emperor Romanos III Argyros, who vomited out some dark-coloured and thick liquid, as well as Theodora who gave her life away after severe diarrhoea, which resulted in complete evacuation of her intestines.¹⁶³

Such a conception of γαστήρ as a sphere of danger, which encapsulates all the above-mentioned ideas, can be further captured by a widespread phenomenon of the so-called *hystera* amulets. These were thought to be magical pendants, which endowed its owners with protection against illnesses, especially uterine conditions. Their iconography is interesting: on the obverse side, it included various images of the so-called Gorgoneion, hence a female head with the heads of snakes surrounding it.¹⁶⁴ The Byzantine version of *Physiologus* elaborates on the gorgon as follows:

Gorgon [is a creature] which possesses a face of a beautiful harlot,¹⁶⁵ and the hair on her head resembles snakes, while her countenance looks like the death. It dances and laughs only during the time of coitus, she inhabits the mountains in the east, and when the day of coitus comes, she begins to roar like a lion or other animals, from man to an ox and a bird or a dragon, saying: "come to me all of you, and enjoy [your] carnal desires" then all of them, who will hear her voice, [begin to] approach her, and once they see her they die [immediately]. For she knows the languages of all animals wild and domestic and of men. And listen now how acts the one who repels her charms: thanks to [his knowledge of] astronomy he knows the day of her lust, and marches towards her dwelling place, bewitching [everyone] from afar. She begins to roar, first like a lion and other animals, and when it reaches her tongue by way of charm, it replies to her, saying: "I cannot see you, but dig out a whole in the quarters where the women live, put your head into it so that you would not see her and die, then I shall come and I shall sleep with you." And once she has heard these words, she did it at once. The one who casts charm approached her, appearing behind [with a sharp sword] and beheaded her, then not looking at her head so that

¹⁶² Socrates of Constantinople, *Life of Euthymios* 7.8–9: ἐξαίφνης δονεῖται ὅλως καὶ τῇ γῇ προσήσεται παρευθὺ τε τὴν ἰδίαν κόπρον σὺν αἵματι. Of course, the story of Lamproudios' death is on the hand linked to what was emitted by his lips (blasphemous words), on the other Lamproudios is linked to Judah by the author of the *Vita*, who was the Biblical prototype of the stories of 'intestinal deaths.' For this see *Acts of the Apostles* 1:18: "With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out." English translation by NIV. Also see my discussion of the coronation procession of Andronikos I Komnenos in Choniates' *History* (ch. 3).

¹⁶³ Psellos, *Chronographia* (on Romanos' III death): III.26.35–38: εἴτα δὴ ἀθρόον ἀναραγὲν, ὑπεκχεῖται διὰ τοῦ στόματος, μελάντερόν τι τὴν χροάν καὶ πεπηγός. ἐφ' ᾧ δὴ δις καὶ τρις ἀσθμάνας τὴν ζωὴν ἀπολείπει. And VI.222.4–7 (on Theodora's death): ἡ γὰρ ἀποκριτικὴ αὐτῇ ὑποκλάσασα δύναμις τὴν τε ὀρεκτικὴν κατήνεγκε καὶ τοῖς τοῦ στόματος ἀπεπεφόρτιστο μέρεσιν, ἔπειτ' ἀθρόον διαρρυεῖσα καὶ τὸ ἐντὸς μικροῦ δεῖν ξύμπαν ἀποβαλοῦσα, ἐν ὀλίγαις ἐκείνην καταλελοίπει ταῖς ἐκπνοαῖς.

¹⁶⁴ The amulets were discussed by J. SPIER, "Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993) 25–62; A. A. BARB, "Diva Matrix: A Faked Gnostic Intaglio in the Possession of P. P. Rubens and the Iconology of a Symbol," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 16.3/4 (1953), 193–238; V. FOSKOLOU, "The Magic of the Written Word: The Evidence of Inscriptions on Byzantine Magical Amulets," *Δελτίον Χριστιανικῆς Αρχαιολογικῆς Εταιρείας* 35 (2014) 329–348.

¹⁶⁵ For the ideas surrounding πορναί in the patristic literature see K. Gaca, "The Sexual and Social Dangers of *Pornai* in the Septuagint Greek Stratum of Patristic Christian Greek Thought" in *Desire and denial in Byzantium: papers from the 31st Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997* (ed.) Liz James. Aldershot 1999, 35–40.

he might not die, but having skillfully covered his face, he went away and threw her into a vessel and bound her tightly ...¹⁶⁶

The *hystera* amulets were rooted in this tradition and were used as ‘uterine phylacteries,’ but the magical inscriptions which were included in their reverse side, which were apotropaic ‘performative, inscriptions supposed to be read aloud and repel the danger, frequently mention the belly and the stomach as well. Some of them refer to the beastly gnawing of the *hystera*:

- Hunger sowed you, air harvested you, vein devoured you. Why do you munch like a wolf, why do you devour like a crocodile why do you bite (or ‘roar’?) like a lion, why do you gore like a bull, why do you coil like a serpent, why do you lie down like a tame creature?¹⁶⁷
- Stomach, anti-stomach, since you ate blood, since you drunk blood, I enchant you!¹⁶⁸
- Black womb/belly, blackened with blood!¹⁶⁹

The interconnection of womb/γαστήρ and στόμαχος with Gorgon¹⁷⁰ dates back to the ancient times in Greek (and Egyptian) tradition. Barb noted that στόμαχος was thought to be the entering-mouth which led to the womb, while the Greek terms denoting the womb, the ‘heart’ and the ‘belly/stomach’ were frequently confused.¹⁷¹ In the lexicon by Hesychius, such a linkage is overt: for he glosses the term ὄδρος (Latin *uterus*) with the noun γαστήρ.¹⁷² Certainly, the amulets were connected to a widespread belief that the womb was an independent animal-like being, which could travel throughout the body, wreak havoc to it and cause serious illnesses.¹⁷³ For this reason, many of the amulets include an image of a saint who conquers the maddened womb. Furthermore, since times immemorial, the womb has been connected in the Greek tradition to the ultimate place of rebirth and death: hence both the primeval chaos, from which everything sprang as well as the hellish abyss.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁶ *Physiologus* 23: “Ἐστὶ γὰρ ἡ γοργόνη μορφὴν ἔχουσα γυναικὸς [εὐμόρφου] πόρνης· αἱ δὲ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς ὡσεὶ ὄφεις, τὸ δὲ εἶδος [τοῦ προσώπου] αὐτῆς θάνατος. παίζει δὲ καὶ γελᾷ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν [τῆς ὀρέξεως] αὐτῆς μόνον, νέμεται δὲ κατὰ τὰ ὅρη τῆς δύσεως, καὶ ὅταν φθάσῃ ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς ὀρέξεως αὐτῆς, ἄρχεται κράζειν ἀπὸ τοῦ λέοντος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ζώων ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπου ἕως κτήνους καὶ πετεινοῦ καὶ δράκοντος, λέγουσα· «δεῦτε πρὸς με [πάντες], καὶ ἀπολαύσατε σαρκικῆς ἐπιθυμίας», καὶ πορεύονται λοιπὸν [πάντα] ὅσα ἂν ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς αὐτῆς, καὶ ὀρώντες αὐτὴν εὐθέως τελευτῶσιν. αὕτη γὰρ γινώσκει πάσας τὰς γλώσσας τῶν ζώων, ἀνθρώπων τε καὶ κτηνῶν. καὶ ποίῳ τρόπῳ κυριεύει αὐτὴν ὁ ἐπασιδός; ἄκουσον· οὗτος γὰρ γινώσκει διὰ τῆς ἀστρονομίας τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς ὀρέξεως αὐτῆς, καὶ πορεύεται κατὰ τὸν τόπον τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῆς, γοητεύων ἀπὸ μακρόθεν· αὕτη δὲ ἄρχεται κράζειν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς τοῦ λέοντος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ζώων, ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ εἰς τὴν τοῦ ἐπασιδοῦ γλῶσσαν, ἀποκρίνεται αὐτὴν ὁ ἐπασιδὸς λέγων· [«οὐ δύναμαί σε ἰδεῖν, ἀλλ’] ὄρυζον στυγερὸν βόθρον εἰς τόπον ὑπερῶν, καὶ βάλε τὴν κεφαλὴν σου ἐκεῖ, ἵνα μὴ ἴδῃ αὐτὴν καὶ τελευτήσῃ, καὶ ἔρχομαι καὶ κοιμῶμαι μετὰ σοῦ»· ἐκείνη δὲ ἀκούσασα ποιεῖ οὕτω συντόμως. ἀπέρχεται λοιπὸν ὁ ἐπασιδὸς ὀπισθοφανῶς [μετὰ ξίφους ἀποτόμου], καὶ ἀποκεφαλίζει αὐτὴν, καὶ οὐχ ὀρᾷ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς ἵνα μὴ ἀποθάνῃ, ἀλλὰ [καλύπτει τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀπέρχεται, καὶ] βάλλει αὐτὴν εἰς ἀγγεῖον, [καὶ δένει αὐτὴν ἀσφαλῶς] ... For Gorgon see as well n. 208.

¹⁶⁷ English translation by BARB, “Diva Matrix” 46.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: [σ]τόμαχε, ἀντιστόμαχε, ὡς αἷμα ἔφαγε, ὥς αἷμα ἔπιε, οὕτω καταδῶ σε.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: ἀστέρα μελανέ, μελανόμενε αἵματος!

¹⁷⁰ As BARB, “Diva Matrix” discerned in almost every iconography the womb is associated with round objects: vessels, jars, or even navel.

¹⁷¹ J. GWYN GRIFFITHS—A. A. BARB, “Seth or Anubis?” *Journal of the Wartburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22.3/4 (Jul.–Dec. 1959) 367–371 at: 368 n. 14.

¹⁷² Hesychios, *Lexikon* ο 74. For this see as well A. A. BARB, “Diva Matrix” 222 n. 106.

¹⁷³ FOSKOLOU, “The Magic of the Written Word.”

¹⁷⁴ The gulf of which in Christian iconography was represented as the jaws of Leviathan, whose prototype was dolphin, a mythological womb-fish. Cf. the Greek term δελφύς, the close connection of δελφύς and δελφίς were discussed by BARB, “Diva Matrix” 200. The interconnection of γαστήρ and χάος is explored at length in the ninth

Thus, as can be gleaned from this overview, in Greek tradition γαστήρ was a space associated with negativity and threat. It was believed that the belly posed danger both at the individual and social level. As a seat of ‘beastly’ pleasures it endangered not only the integrity of a human being but also of entire social array and those who lived by it had to be cast out of society. Moreover, as Bakker and Pucci showed, characterizing any human activity through γαστήρ almost always opens up the potential for parody and irony. Let us now return to *In Iacobum* to see how all these conceptualizations were used by Psellos.

2.4. The Γαστήρ-motif in *In Iacobum*

I have pointed out above that γαστήρ is a dominant motif in Psellos’ characterization of Jacob in *In Iacobum*. This a focus on Jacob’s insatiable belly allows Psellos to introduce a wide array of imagery drawn from iambic and comic tradition. In the invective Psellos almost obsessively revolves around the motifs of crude physiology and deranged, transmogrified body. Physicality is one of the most pronounced features of *In Iacobum*. Throughout the *kanon* we constantly see Jacob slurping greedily unmixed wine from *pithoi*, wine-vats, enormous drinking vessels and bowls:

With steady heart and shameless soul,
you were seen drinking unmixed wine without any fear:
truly, neither did the emptied-out vessels scare you,
nor the *pithoi* which were streaming directly to your gut.¹⁷⁵

He is very proud of his drunken feats and boasts himself:

“I do not mix my wine with water, neither cold nor warm!
What am I, a tavern-keeper? I wash it down neat!”¹⁷⁶

Or, as can be seen in another humorous image:

With your heart stricken with a missile,
You flee unyieldingly like a hunted deer
To slurp all the springs of wine:
You gulp down all the wine-vats and *pithoi*, o insatiable,
And neither Nile nor the sea could quench your thirst, father Jacob.¹⁷⁷

In keeping with iambic representation, special attention is paid not only to Jacob’s enormous belly, but to all body parts which constitute human digestive system: lips, mouth, throat and anus. Just as in iambic poetry ravenous mouth of Jacob is closely associated to his gaping posterior as well as other cavities of his body. Jacob is so completely full of wine and he leaks it like an overfilled wineskin:

You were seen on the earth as a grape-vine full of fruits,

oration of Eustathius of Thessalonike: Eustathios, *Oration* 9.165.4–28. For further discussion see LABUK, “Preliminary Remarks” 112–113.

¹⁷⁵ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 17–20: Σταθῆρὸς τὴν καρδίαν καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν πάντολμος / καὶ ἀκαταπτόητος ὥφθης ῥοφῶν τὸν ἄκρατον· ὅθεν οὐκ ἔπτηξας οὐδὲ ληνοὺς κενουμένους / οὐδὲ πίθους ῥέοντας ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ σου. All English translations from *In Iacobum* are mine.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 123–124: οὐκ ἔμιξα τῷ οἴνῳ ὥσπερ κάπηλος ὕδωρ, / οὐ ψῦχον οὐδὲ ζέον, / ἀκράτου τούτου σπῶμαι. Please note that I do not follow the original text word-for-word in my translation to accentuate the humorous overtone of the passage. By drinking his wine neat, Jacob is simultaneously presented as a Barbarian who does not follow the civilized of watering down his wine.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 51–56: Βέλει τρωθεῖς σὺ τὴν καρδίαν ὡς ἔλαφος / ἀνενδότως τρέχεις ἐλαυνόμενος πάσας πιεῖν οἴνου τὰς πηγὰς, / ὅλους ἐκροφῆσαι ληνοὺς καὶ πίθους, ἀκόρεστε, / καὶ στήσαι σου τὴν δίψαν / οὐδὲ Νεῖλος ἰσχύει οὐδὲ θάλασσα, πάτερ Ἰάκωβε.

Dripping with wine, the heaviest kind from every side:
 From the throat, from the eyes,
 From the 'back door,' from the entire body of yours.
 For you are pouring out not sweats, but strong wine,
 And you are leaking like a wine-skin, o Jacob.¹⁷⁸

By evoking crude physical reactions, Psellos consciously plays with disgust intermingled with irony: a mechanism similar to the one employed in *In Sabbaitam*. Jacob, just as other drunkards, is depicted while he is vomiting. His huge belly cannot contain wine and “gushes it out through all the pipes of his body”.¹⁷⁹ Lying naked on his bed and drunk, Jacob farts (36: πίνεις ἀνενδότης, ἴσως καὶ πέρδεις, ἰάκωβε), he belches, sends out sour fumes and “howling winds” (73–74: πληρωθεὶς γὰρ μέθης βορβορυγμούς, ὄξυρεγμίας ὠρυγὰς τε ἐκπέμπεις καὶ πνεύματα) and soils his bed. These scatological motifs are of course in line with mundane iambic aesthetics and Byzantine sense of humour.¹⁸⁰

Simultaneously, unlike in the *In Sabbaitam*, Psellos seems to be careful enough not to cross the line and exceedingly vulgarize the content of his poem. All the secular terms employed to denote bodily reactions (βορβορυγμοί, ὠρυγαί, πνεύματα, ἀποβλύζω) have been taken by the author from medical literature,¹⁸¹ thus belong to the higher and scientific register of the language. As Bain and Hultin remarked, medical writers “scrupulously avoided” any kind of obscene words while discussing human physiology.¹⁸² Hence, Psellos seems to appropriate crude iambic imagery and cast into more discreet and euphemistic form characteristic of Biblical language of abuse, and to conform it to the genre of *kanon*. Again, according to the precepts of comic discursive strategy, low elements are clothed in lofty words to enhance their comic effect.

The theme of such a drunken, consumptive and sickly physicality is neatly rounded up by Jacob’s constant and unquenchable thirst. Psellos exhibits his rhetorical *inventio* in the series of vivid images:

Even the poisonous snake yields you Jacob, you beast!
 Burning with fever which is not quenched by the drink,

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 45–50: “Ὁφθης ἐν γῇ ἄμπελος, πάτερ, πολὺκαρπος, / οἶνον στάζων πάντοθεν παχύτατον, / ἐκ τοῦ λαιμοῦ, ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, / ἐκ τῆς κάτω θύρας, ἀπὸ παντός σου τοῦ σώματος / ἰδρώτας γὰρ ἐκχέεις, ἀλλὰ μέθην βαρεῖαν / ὡς ἄσκος διαρρεύσας, ἰάκωβε. Incidentally, such catalogues of physical items as well as bodily reactions, which appear throughout *In Iacobum* (list of physiological reactions v. 73–74, list of vessels which Jacob can empty v. 81–84, lists of wines 113–118) is another standard feature of Aristophanic comedies and Rabelaisian world WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef* 4–51, BACHTIN, *Rabelais and His World* 358 and 371–377; F. RABELAIS, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. By François Rabelais, M. A. Screech (ed. & transl.). London 2006, I.13, III.2.

¹⁷⁹ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 111–112: ἡ γαστήρ σου καὶ γὰρ τὸν οἶνον μὴ χωροῦσα δι’ ὀχετῶν τοῦ σώματος ἀποβλύζει τοῦτον.

¹⁸⁰ They frequently appear in Aristophanic comedies, which was discussed at length by WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef* 21–29 and HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* 187–203.

¹⁸¹ Also noticed by CONCA, “La lingua e lo stile” 195. Similarly, as BACHTIN, *Rabelais and his World* 355 noticed, Rabelaisian physiology was considerably influenced by the Hippocratic writings.

¹⁸² HULTIN, *The Ethics of Obscene Speech* 153; D. BAIN, “Six Greek Verbs of Sexual Congress (βινῶ, κινῶ, πυγίζω, ληκῶ, οἶφω, λαικάζω)” *Classical Quarterly* 41.1 (1991) 53. As BAIN moreover noted even the verb πέρδω occurs in the medical treatises, at 52 n. 8. Also, the cognates of ῥοφέω (to slurp greedily, to sup), which so frequently appear in the comic works, are widely attested in medical treatises of Hippocratic and Galenic corpora. Psellos *In Iacobum*, 18: ῥοφῶν τὸν ἄκρατον; 62: ἐκροφᾷς θαυμασίως τὸν ἄκρατον; 81: ῥοφήματί σου ἐνὶ ἐκένωσας δέκα κύλικας; 53–54: πάσας ... οἶνου τὰς πηγὰς ὅλους ἐκροφῆσαι; 84–84: λείπεται ... ἐκροφῆσαι καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν.

Conflagration that cannot be endured and parched land:¹⁸³

Just like Hades or sea, you will not fill your stomach through drinking.

The word-play in the first verse of this strophe cannot be satisfactorily rendered into English. Διψάς which is mentioned here refers, as the entry in the *Suda* informs us, to a kind of snake, whose deadly venom causes such an intense sensation of fever and thirst that those who are bitten by it almost burst. Psellos achieves comic effect by stating that even this snake cannot cause thirst comparable to the one experienced by Jacob.¹⁸⁴ Simultaneously, Psellos plays with homophony between the noun διψάς and the aorist participle from the verb διψάω, to be thirsty. Further fire- and heat-related images of burning fever, conflagration and parched land reinforce the entire picture.

What is more, by resorting to sea-related metaphors Psellos consciously uses and alters marine metaphors which were employed both in sympotic and comic literary traditions in reference to drunkenness.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, Psellos resorts to water- and sea-related metaphors several times in order to emphasize infinite capacity of Jacob's belly to take in wine. Neither the biggest river of the world known to Psellos, nor the sea itself could quench the insatiable thirst of the monk (v. 55–56). Although he constantly gulps down liters of wine, his stomach simply cannot be satiated: it is like the sea whose level never rises even though rivers flow into it (v. 134–136). At times, Psellos intermingles such marine imagery with other motifs drawn from ancient sympotic tradition:

With one gulp, you managed to empty ten cups,
And, taking in one more breath, you dried up a twenty-metre wineskin;
Now all that is left to you, Jacob, is to open your maw wide,
And to gulp down the entire sea.¹⁸⁶

Pointing to the enormous capacities of Jacob's belly, Psellos explores wide-known comic motifs of 'breathless drinking' known from the comic tradition preserved by Athenaeus.¹⁸⁷ In doing so, Psellos not only exhibits his in-depth knowledge of ancient literary tradition (a trait that was definitely expected from a learned Byzantine author), but also shows his rhetorical *inventio* in adapting it into new context. Further on, Psellos addresses Jacob as follows:

You fastened your feet in a wine vat,
You are holding your hands on the bunches of grapes,
And you are sending [greedy] glances to the wineskins, o wise father.
With your mouth fixed on the bottom of a cask, you quaff it like a bull:
Not taking any breath, without any effort at all,
You lift it up like a tide.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Cf. Philo Judaeus, *On Drunkenness* 27: τέταρτον τοίνυν καὶ μέγιστον ἔγκλημα ἦν τὸ μεθύειν, οὐκ ἀνειμένως, ἀλλὰ σφόδρα συντόνως· τὸ γὰρ οἰνοφλυγεῖν ἴσον ἐστὶ τῷ τὸ παραίτιον ἀφροσύνης φάρμακον, ἀπαιδευσίαν, ἐντύφεισθαι καὶ ἀνακαίεσθαι καὶ ἀναφλέγεσθαι μηδέποτε σβεσθῆναι δυναμένην, ἀλλ' ὅλην δι' ὅλων αἰεὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐμπυρᾶσάν τε καὶ πυρπολοῦσαν.

¹⁸⁴ *Suda* δ 1306: Διψάς· εἶδος ὄφεως. ἔστι δὲ ἔχως ὀλιγωτέρα, ἀποκτεῖναι δὲ ὀξυτέρα. οἱ δὲ δηχθέντες ἐξ αὐτῆς ἐξάπτονται εἰς δίψος ὥστε ῥήγνυσθαι.

¹⁸⁵ For an extended discussion of this comic motif see the section on John Kamateros' drunkenness in chapter 3.

¹⁸⁶ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 81–84: Ῥοφήματί σου ἐνὶ ἐκένωσας δέκα κύλικας, / τῷ πνεύματι δὲ προσθείς, ἀσκὸν εἰκοσάμετρον· / λείπεται, ἰάκωβε, τὸ στόμα πλατύνας / ἐκροφῆσαι καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν.

¹⁸⁷ For more discussion on this motif see my discussion of John Kamateros in chapter 3.

¹⁸⁸ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 139–142: καὶ τοῖς ἀσκοῖς πέμπεις σου τὸ βλέμμα, πάτερ σοφέ· / ἐρείσας δὲ τὸ στόμα σου ἐν βαθεῖ κυπέλλῳ πίνεις ὡς βοῦς, / οὐδ' ὅλως ἀναπνέων, οὐδ' ὅλως ἐπασθμαίνων, / ἀλλ' ἀνεγκύων ὥσπερ ἄμπωτις.

The last verse refers the us back again to the sea-related metaphors: it is already clear that Jacob is not covered by the *pithoi* which are filled to the brim, huge vessels or even monstrous wineskins (v. 19–20). He is presented as such a mighty drunkard that even the traditional means resorted to by the boozers are not enough for him: he sweeps gigantic vessels like a tide and could drink up the entire oceans! This parodic imagery finds its comic climax in the following verse:

Even though God, the creator of all, filled the abyss,
And flooded the cavities of the sea with water,
He would not fill your broad stomach, father,
Which, like a sewer, admits everything in its abyss.¹⁸⁹

The strophe is built on a neat antithesis and defies the expectations of the reader/listener. For even the almighty God would fail trying to fill Jacob's abysmal gut. His γαστήρ is simply beyond any human and divine grasp and he drinks so much that he seems not to be composed of flesh: νόμος ἔστι σοι ... πάντα σου τοῦ βίου τον χρόνον πίνειν ὡς ἄσαρκος.

Here, and in other strophes of his *kanon*, Psellos develops the *gaster*-motif around 'abysmal' imagery. Κοιλία stands not only for Jacob's insatiable gut, but also it reinforces its unfathomable consumptive capacities:

Diamonds and iron cede to drops,
Even the stones are hollowed out [κοιλαίνονται] by constant dripping,
But the emptied *pithoi* did not blunt
Your insatiable stomach.¹⁹⁰

The piecemeal presentation of body which is persistent throughout *In Iacobum*¹⁹¹ reinforces such an anti-civic and anti-religious nature of Jacob. What is more, not only is he reduced mostly to his digestive system, but he seems to belong to animal, not human world. Indeed, he even possesses birds' crop (πρηγορεύων¹⁹²), where he sends wine which he consumes (v. 133: και γάρ εἰσδεχόμενος πρηγορεύωνι πέμπεις ευθύς). He is presented as an insatiable animal (ζῷον ἀκόρεστον), he sends his glances to wine like a bull (βλέπων ὥσπερ ταῦρος) and drinks (greedily) like an ox (πίνεις ὡς βοῦς). Last but not least, through his stomach, Jacob is closely attached to the concepts of filth and pollution. He uses his *gaster* like a gutter (v. 24: ὡς σωλήν γὰρ ἅπαντα κενοῖς δεχόμενος) filling the 'pithos in his belly' with endless streams of wine (v. 20: πίθους ῥέοντας ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ σου v. 100: ὡς ἔρρυη χρομένος).

2.5. The Non-ascetic Asceticism: Γαστήρ Transformed into an Ἀσκός

Setting the physiological/iambic side of the *kanon* aside for a moment, the motif Jacob's gargantuan belly plays a much deeper literary role. It introduces both complex intertextual allusiveness as well as mixture of antithetical symbolism, and elements which stem from contradictory discourses.¹⁹³ Surprisingly enough, Psellos employs what I have

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 21–24: Ὁ πληρώσας ἀβύσσους δημιουργὸς κύριος / καὶ τὴν τῆς θαλάσσης κοιλίαν μεστῶσας ὕδατος / σὴν οὐκ ἐπλήρωσε, πάτερ, πλατεῖαν γαστέρα· / ὡς σωλήν γὰρ ἅπαντα κενοῖς δεχόμενος.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 85–88: Ὑπείκουσι σταλαγμοῖς καὶ σίδηροι καὶ ἀδάμαντες, / ῥανίσι δὲ συνεχεῖ αἱ πέτραι κοιλαίνονται· / τὸν σὸν δὲ ἀκόρεστον στόμαχον οἱ πίθοι / ἐκκενούμενοι οὐκ ἤμβλυναν.

¹⁹¹ Which is yet another trait characteristic of iambic discourse: WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 14–19, 127.

¹⁹² I.e. the part adjacent to the gullet, where the birds store food prior to its digestion, for this see *Suda*, π 2260, π 2412 and π 2413.

¹⁹³ Cf. Hermogenes' traits of a comic discourse (παρά προσδοκίαν) which I discussed above.

labelled as the γαστήρ-motif, in order to channel and bond together strictly religious imagery alongside with mundane iambic representation.

Such a mundane-versus-Christian dialectic can be best gleaned from reconfiguring Jacob's body as well as his belly into a monstrous wineskin, ἄσκος. In doing so, Psellos opens a vast array of elements and symbols drawn from both pagan and Christian traditions. Certainly, such an equation of huge γαστήρ and ἄσκος date back as early as the times of the Old Comedy. It is present for instance in the *Acharnians* 1000–1003:

HERALD:

Hear this, people! According to ancestral custom, drink your pitchers when the trumpet sounds; and whoever is the very first to drink up will win a Ctesiphon-size wineskin!¹⁹⁴

As the extant scholia comment on the expression 'ἄσκον Κτησιφώντος,' Ctesiphon is derided here as a pot-bellied man.¹⁹⁵ This motif has been preserved into Byzantine times through the *lexika*, as can be seen in *Suda* entries π 830 as well as in α 4177. A closer look at the latter may provide us with additional interpretative keys to *In Iacobum*. The entry elaborates on the expression "a wineskin in frost" (ἄσκος ἐν πάχνη) and begins with a quotation taken from the *Psalms* 118.¹⁹⁶ Following Theodoret's commentary,¹⁹⁷ the author of the entry explains as follows:

David says that he became like *a wineskin in frost*. For when a wineskin is heated, it relaxes, and when it is inflated it is puffed up; whereas in frost it hardens and becomes stiff. In the same way, the nature of the body becomes relaxed and swollen through wantonness, but through ascetic training it is humbled and squeezed. Paul witnesses to this, saying: *No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize ...* Also "Ctesiphon's wineskin" [in] Aristophanes ...¹⁹⁸

It is this kind of convergence of both pagan and Christian strands of thought that Psellos appropriates and elaborates on in his *kanon*. Certainly, ἄσκος and its homophonic derivatives which stem from the verb ἄσκέω, are the terms which appear most frequently in the *In Iacobum*. Through such a literary play, Psellos staples together two incompatible spheres: Dionysiac drunkenness and monkish self-restraint (or rather, lack thereof).

Certainly, in *In Iacobum* Psellos points to the physical attributes of wineskins, described in the above entry in the *Suda*. Jacob's body is swollen by luxury and by the fire of insatiable thirst. Living extravagantly, he scorned all the prescribed ascetic practices (v. 5–8, ἀσκητικὰς

¹⁹⁴ English translation by J. HENDERSON, *Aristophanes: Acharnians, Knights*. London 1998, 185.

¹⁹⁵ *Scholia to Acharnians* 1002: ἄσκον Κτησιφώντος: ὡς παχὺς καὶ προγάστωρ ὁ Κτησιφών σκώπτεται.

¹⁹⁶ *Psalms* 118:83: ...ὅτι ἐγενήθην ὡς ἄσκος ἐν πάχνη· τὰ δικαιώματά σου οὐκ ἐπελαθόμην.

¹⁹⁷ Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalms* 1848 col. b–c.

¹⁹⁸ *Suda* α 4177: Ἀσκος ἐν πάχνη· ὁ Δαβὶδ λέγει, ὅτι ἐγενήθην ὡς ἄσκος ἐν πάχνη. ὁ ἄσκος θερμαινόμενος χαυνοῦται καὶ φυσώμενος ἐξογκοῦται, ἐν δὲ τῇ πάχνη σκληρύνεται καὶ πήγνυται. οὕτω καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἡ φύσις χαυνοῦται μὲν τῇ τρυφῇ καὶ ἐξογκοῦται, τῇ δὲ ἀσκητικῇ ἀγωγῇ ταπεινοῦται καὶ πιέζεται. καὶ τούτου μάρτυς ὁ Παῦλος βοῶν· ἀλλ' ὑποπιέζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ, μή πως ἄλλοις κηρύξας αὐτὸς ἀδόκιμος γένωμαι ... καὶ Ἀσκος Κτησιφώντος· Ἀριστοφάνης· The author of the entry refers to 1 *Cor.* 9:27 (I am following *NIV* in all Biblical quotations in English) and Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 1000–1003. As is further attested to by Climacus' *Divine Ladder*, human belly was indeed compared to a wineskin, which has to be shrunk by hunger and constant ascetic practices, *PG* 88 864 col. b: Μαλασσόμενοι ἄσκοι ἐπιδιδούσι τῇ χωρήσει, περιφρονούμενοι δὲ οὐ τοσοῦτον δέχονται· ὁ καταναγκάζων γαστέρα αὐτοῦ, ἐπλάτυνεν ἔντερα· ὁ δὲ ἀγωνιζόμενος πρὸς αὐτήν, συνέσφιγξε ταῦτα· τούτων δὲ συσφιγθέντων, οὐ πολλὰ δέχονται· καὶ τότε λοιπὸν γινόμεθα φυσικῶς νηστεύοντες

πράξεις), he quenches his feverish longing for a drink by drinking larger quantities of neat wine.¹⁹⁹ As a result of such an incontinent drinking of wine (which was believed to possess heating qualities), Jacob has managed to transform his body into a porous and inflated wineskin. Γαστήρ, comically reconfigured in the form a swollen ἄσκος, becomes a nodal point in which religious and ascetic imagery are joined together with the appetitive iambic discourse. With his body transformed into an ἄσκος, Jacob has set himself as a direct opposite of everything that a proper pious monk should be. Instead of living as if he did not have a physical body, he drinks all nights and days as if he did not possess one (v. 26: πίνειν ὡς ἄσαρκος, v. 65–66: πίνεις γὰρ τὰς νύκτας ὡς ἄσώματος). Rather than actually training his body, he managed to ‘subdue his flesh with *pithei* like a female slave,’ and compel it to drunkenness and incontinence.²⁰⁰

Hence, the only ἄσκησις which is familiar to Jacob, is a practice of drunkenness (ἡ ἐργασία τῆς μεθῆς), that is constant filling his insatiable gut with ἄσκοι. Spending his entire life ‘in the belly of a wine-jar’ (μένων τῆς ζωῆς σου τὸν χρόνον ἐν τῇ τοῦ πίθου γαστρὶ), he wallows in sloth and gluttony. As we shall see below, even the tears which every monk was supposed to shed, turn in the case of Jacob to overflows of his drunken body with which he soils his bed. The ultimate point of this striking dialectic of ἄσκος and ἄσκησις comes with the following strophe, which seems to be an epitome of Hermogenes’ theory of the comic:

Ἀσκήσεως κανόνας οὐκ ἀναγνοῦς
 ἀσκητὴς ἀνεφάνης αὐτόματος
 ἀσκῶν, σοφέ, ἄσκησιν τὴν ὄντως ἀσκητικὴν·
 ἀσκητικῶς γὰρ ἤσκησας πίνων ἐν ἀσκήσει πολλοὺς ἀσκούς·
 ἀσκήσας δὲ ἐν βίῳ ἀσκήσεως τοὺς ἄθλους,
 ἀσκούς ἐν βίῳ πάντας εἴληφας.²⁰¹

Thus, as Psellos jokingly concludes, the only ascesis, which is practiced by Jacob is not driven by his piety, but through his insatiable gut, which is brimming with wine like an enormous wineskin (ἄσκος).

2.6. Jacob-Wineskin and Poetic Contest

Still more, there is yet another layer of meanings introduced by Psellos by means of γαστήρ- and its cognate ἄσκος-motif which again draws from rich pagan Greek tradition and ties it closely to traditionally religious form of the *kanon*. After all, one of the most conspicuous cases of a transformation into an ἄσκος is the mythical story of poetic contest between Marsyas and Apollo. In one version of the story, Marsyas purportedly challenged Apollo in the aulos-playing contest, lost and was punished by the god by being flayed and changed into a

¹⁹⁹ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 90–92: πληρώσας γὰρ εὐφυῶς / ἀκράτου τὴν κύλικα τῷ ψυχρῷ φλεγμαίνουσιν τὴν ὀργὴν κοιμίζεις καὶ νικᾷς τὰ πάθη, πάνσοφε, v. 108 σβέσας τὴν φλόγα, πάντιμε, ἀκράτῳ πολυποσίᾳ)

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 75–80: Ὑπέταξας τὴν σάρκα, ἐχαλιναγώγησας εἰς τὰ συμπόσια, / καὶ ὡς δούλη πίθους ἐπεφόρτισας ἀκράτου γέμοντας, / καὶ πρὸς πᾶσαν μέθην καὶ ἀκρασίαν ἀναγκάζεις, / καὶ ὑπεῖκει σοι, πάτερ Ἰάκωβε. CONCA, “La lingua e lo stile” 194 noted that χαλιναγωγή (lit. guide with bridle) is tightly connected to the ideas expressed in ascetic literature.

²⁰¹ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 49–54.

wineskin.²⁰² This variant of the story was certainly known to the Byzantines and was quoted, for instance, by John Tzetzes in the twelfth century in his *Chiliades*.²⁰³

As Bernard has noted, Psellos' *kanon*-invective, just as *In Sabbaitam*, should be understood as a part of a public poetic contest within the circle of Constantinopolitan learned literati (λογικός ἀγών). Jacob most probably composed and delivered publicly some kind of invective against Psellos (which is unfortunately not extant), to which he answers in *In Iacobum*. The unwritten rules of the λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες included outwitting and outsmarting one's literary opponent by exhibiting more elaborate literary skills, wider knowledge of Greek literary heritage and witty or even elusive literary games.²⁰⁴ It is not at all impossible that Psellos alludes here to the famous story of Marsyas' contest with Apollo. By altering Jacob's body into an ἄσκος, Psellos might suggest that Jacob is a poor performer and an unworthy poet who, just as Marsyas, only deserves to be punished in the way that his mythical anti-type was chastised. Furthermore, as both the scholia on Aristophanes' comedies and the *Suda* emphasize, those whose bellies are like ἄσκοί are marked by their low intellectual qualities.²⁰⁵

By referring to the ancient comic *topoi*, Psellos defames Jacob as an ignorant and unschooled writer who is unable match his literary skill. In the same vein, the comparisons of Jacob to a bull or an ox clearly point to his boorishness and were used widely by the other authors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, various kinds of wine which gush forth from Jacob's face might serve as another hint at this performative setting of the poem. In an extremely ironic strophe Psellos again captures Jacob's countenance as a swollen, porous and leaking wineskin:

Your countenance grew the ripest grapes, o Jacob,
Gushing forth various types of wine:
Chian through your eyes, Pramnian through your jaw,
Flowery scented through the pipes of your brows,
Kian through your lips, and through your mouth, father,
sweet-smelling and black-coloured ones.

In the comic and sympotic literature, wine and its consumption were traditionally linked to poetic production.²⁰⁷ And, just as various types of wine differ in quality, so does poetry. The Pramnian, which springs from Jacob's jaws, refers (perhaps not coincidentally at all) to a passage of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* where its sour and unpleasant taste is equated with bad poetic output:

... and Aristophanes says that the Athenians did not like it, for that "the Athenian people *did not like hard and sour poets, nor hard Pramnian wines*,

²⁰² Such a version is quoted for instance in Plato's *Euthydemus* 285.c–d.

²⁰³ Tzetzes, *Chiliades* VII.106, mentioned also by Prodhomos, *The Ignorant or the Self-Proclaimed Grammarian* 7–16, in G. PODESTA, "Le satire Luchianese di Teodore Prodromo" *Aevum* 19.3–4, July–December 1945, 239–252 at 242; cf. Lucian, *Harmonides* 1.

²⁰⁴ For this see Bernard, *Writing and Reading* 253–290.

²⁰⁵ *Suda* π 830.

²⁰⁶ See for instance the 11th-century versed invective against a man who was appointed a bishop of Philomelion, written by Michael Grammatikos, (*Against the Bishop of Philomelion*) which is centered around oxen-related imagery: S. G. MERCATI, "Ancora intorno a Μιχαήλ Γραμματικός ὁ ἱερομόναχος" in A. A. Longo (ed.), *Collectanea Byzantina*. Bari 1970, 121–135, at 128–131. Boorishness and urbanity as the literary *topoi* in Constantinopolitan elite in 11th and 12th centuries were discussed by BERNARD, *Reading and Writing* 187–192 and C. CUPANE, "Στήλη τῆς ἀστεϊότητος. Byzantinische Vorstellungen weltlicher Vollkommenheit in Realität und Fiktion" *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 45, 2012 193–209. See also CONCA, "La lingua e lo stile" 195, who adds that κραυγή can also point to Jacob's animalistic features, I am discussing it in the further sections of the article.

²⁰⁷ Also see my discussion of the drunken speechifying of John Kamateros in chapter 3.

which contract the eyebrows and the stomach; but they prefer a fragrant wine, ripe, and flavoured like nectar.”²⁰⁸

It seems possible then that Psellos suggests that Jacob’s poetry is as sour and distasteful as Pramnian wine was thought to be. Finally, Psellos ties Jacob to the rhetorical concept of ἔκπληξις:

You astound [ἐκπλήττεις] the angelic orders in heaven,
And human souls on the earth,
Because, fixing your lips on the wineskins,
You gulp down unmixed wine, and you stare like a bull,
Drinking ceaselessly up to the dregs, father,
You do not even wear out one breath.

Ἐκπληξις, terror, consternation or amazement is, according to Longinus’ treatise *On the Sublime*, an expressive effect which a sublime poetry exerts on its audience.²⁰⁹ It is closely linked with φαντασία, a mental re-presentation of a sensory experience, and it creates a vivid illusion of seeing a certain object or a scene. Contrary to the prose-related ἐναργεία, it stirs disquieting feelings of wonder and terror. As van Eck noticed, in the theoretical framework of Demetrius of Phaleron, ἔκπληξις is always ambivalent: it emerges when the awe- and terror-inspiring element is mingled with the comic, ironic or even grotesque.²¹⁰ Surely, it is this sense that Psellos has in mind here. Jacob’s gigantic gut and his unfathomable drunkenness render speechless (with awe and terror) not only the actual earthly audience, but it perplexes even the angelic orders in heaven!²¹¹ Once more, Psellos engages jokingly in the λογικὸς ἀγών, and leaves an auto-commentary on his own poetical skill, as if he was saying to Jacob, “Look, you simply could not have won this!” In the end, Jacob—a failure of a monk and a mediocrity of a poet—must be led out of the city in a shame-parade, almost like an ancient scape-goat (φαρμακός, κάθαρμα):²¹²

We shall put the wreaths of vine-grapes
On your head, o father Jacob,
And we shall hang the bunches of grapes on your ears,
And we shall attach *askoi* full of wine around your neck,
And we shall shout vigorously “Drinking unceasingly,
You shamefully pillory yourself!”

²⁰⁸ Italics are mine. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* I.58, Aristophanes, *Fragments* 579. English translation by C.D. Yonge, *Athenaeus. The Deipnosophists. or Banquet of The Learned of Athenaeus*. London 1854 50.

²⁰⁹ Longinus, *On the Sublime* 15.

²¹⁰ Demetrios of Phaleron, *Elocutio* 283; C. VAN ECK, “The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, Ekplexis, and the Sublime,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8.2 (2016) 1–22, at 3–5. So far, no extensive study has been devoted to ἔκπληξις in Byzantium. The interconnection of awe-inspiring look and gorgon in Pseudo-Lucian’s *Philopatris* 8.1–6: Ἄρεα δὲ καὶ Ἀφροδίτην οἶδα μὴ παραδέχεσθαι σε διὰ τὸ προδιαβληθῆναι πρώην παρὰ σοῦ. ὥστε ἑάσωμεν τούτους. τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἔτι ἐπιμνησθήσομαι, τῆς παρθένου, τῆς ἐνόπλου καὶ καταπληκτικῆς θεᾶς, ἥ καὶ τὴν τῆς Γοργόνος κεφαλὴν ἐν τῷ στήθει περιάπτεται, τὴν γιγαντολέτιν θεόν. οὐ γὰρ ἔχεις τι λέγειν περὶ αὐτῆς.

²¹¹ It is noteworthy that earlier in the text Jacob is connected to the ambivalent notion of θαῦμα (wonder, marvel) v. 9: θαυμάτων πέρα ὁ καλὸς Ἰάκωβος, v. 63: ἐκροφᾷς θαυμασίως τὸν ἄκρατον, v. 130: ὦ ξένον θαυμασίω.

²¹² For the connection of φαρμακός, κάθαρμα to Aristophanic language see AGAPITOS, “John Tzetzes.”

2.7. Biblical and Iambic Discourses Meet Together

Psellos builds the imagery of the poem upon the Biblical symbolism of wine and vine. To be sure, such Biblical connotations of wine could not have escaped the audience of Psellos' *kanon*. As Conca asserted, Psellos alludes to deeper theological meanings, situating Jacob as an individual whose violent consumptive behaviours are not only anti-ecclesiastical, but also utterly anti-Christian.²¹³ Without any doubt, Psellos consciously plays with motifs taken from both the *Old* and *New Testament*. Consider for instance *John* 15:1–8, where Jesus pictures himself as a true vine (ἡ ἄμπελος ἀληθινή) and God, his father, as a farmer. The Jews are portrayed as branches of this vine which will grow and prosper for as long they remain truthful to their farmer. Those branches which are against God, will be cut off and cast to fire.²¹⁴

Surely, it is with reference to the above metaphors that Psellos subversively casts Jacob in the role of a polar opposite to Noah. In the third and the fourth odes of the *kanon*, Psellos refers famous episode of the drunkenness of Noah from *Genesis* 9:20–23 in which Noah plants a vine-tree and, having consumed wine made out of it gets drunk, while his sons find him lying naked and sleeping on the ground. Anagnostakis and Papamatsorakis pointed out numerous common threads between Jacob's and Noah's story: shameful nakedness (v. 34–35: καὶ γυμνώσας στῆθος καὶ τὸν τράχηλον καὶ τὸν μηρὸν ἄχρι τῆς αἰδοῦς), the motifs of reclining (v. 33: ἀναπεσὼν ὑπτιος ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης σου), repose (v. 64: οὐδὲ τῇ γαστρὶ σου ἀνάπαυσιν δέδωκας), and farming.²¹⁵ Certainly, this is true. But Psellos, through deep intertextual allusiveness, aims to suggest that Jacob is everything that Biblical Noah was not. Contrary to his Biblical anti-type, he did not plant any vine tree in his life (v. 57: οὐ φυτεύσας ἀμπέλους),²¹⁶ and despite this very fact he has managed to dry up a plethora of wine-vats. Just as other drunkards and gluttons he rips the harvest of others:

Though you had not planted the grape vines,
You cropped many of them, o father,
And, not having squeezed their bunches,
With your feet, you drunk their entire vats,
And though you do not add water to your bowl of strong wine,
But you amazingly gulp it down.²¹⁷

Indeed, instead of being the second Noah, Jacob turned himself rather to a worshipper of, or even Dionysos himself. As Anagnostakis and Papamatsorakis showed, Psellos draws here from the tradition of visual arts, whose beginnings date back to late antiquity and within which the Jewish tradition (Noah), Greek (Dionysios) and Christian (Christ as true wine) were welded together. Jacob is not only an archetype and a model, (κανὼν καὶ τύπος τοῖς μεθύουσι), but shows himself to be a frenzied bacchant:

²¹³ CONCA, "La lingua e lo stile" 194–195. For a similar imagery in Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* see v. 72–73: ὃς ἀμπελώνων οὐκ ἐρῶν ἀλλοτρίων / τῆς ἀμπέλου πέφυκε τῆς θείας βότρυς.

²¹⁴ *John* 15:1–8: Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργὸς ἐστίν ... ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα. ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ οὗτος φέρει καρπὸν πολύν, ὅτι χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν. ἐὰν μὴ τις μένῃ ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἔξω ὡς τὸ κλῆμα καὶ ἐξηράνθη, καὶ συνάγουσιν αὐτὰ καὶ εἰς τὸ πῦρ βάλλουσιν καὶ καίεται. Similar images are employed in the *Psal* 80:8–13, *Hos.* 10:1–2, *Jer.* 2:21 (among others). For this reason, Jacob is presented as a vine-tree.

²¹⁵ This was discussed by ANAGNOSTAKIS–PAPAMATSORAKIS, "Ἐκμανὴς νέος Βάκχος."

²¹⁶ Of course, as opposed to Noah in *Gen.* 9:20 Καὶ ἤρξατο Νωε ἄνθρωπος γεωργὸς γῆς καὶ ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπέλων.

²¹⁷ Psellos *In Iacobum* 57–62: Οὐ φυτεύσας ἀμπέλους, / πάτερ, ἐν τῷ βίῳ σου πολλὰς ἐτρύγησας, / οὐδὲ θλίψας βότρυν / τοῖς ποσὶ σου ληνοὺς ὄλους πέπωκας, / οὐδὲ ὕδωρ βάλλων / ἐν τῇ φιάλῃ σου τῆς μέθης / ἐκροφᾷς θαυμασίως τὸν ἄκρατον.

Adorn your head with laurel leaves,
Wrap yourself with a deer skin,
And moving your thyrsus, raise a cry to Dionysios:
“Eu, hyis attis! Bromios, grape-holder, treader of the wine-vats!”²¹⁸

Interestingly enough, the picture which Psellos paints here, along with the ritual shouts, are almost direct references to Demosthenes’ *On the Crown* 260, where they are used to demean Aeschines who leads a crowd of old hags (τῶν γράδιων) in drunken ecstatic revels.²¹⁹ Thus, contrary to pious Noah, Jacob takes interest only in the drunken revels and Dionysiac orgies.

Through setting Jacob apart from Noah, as his exact opposite, Psellos simultaneously casts him into the subversive role of a monk who breaks every rule of godly monkish life. Contrary to the rules (*kanones*), Jacob does not care to cultivate the land: he lies naked on his bed and drinks all days and nights long. Certainly, Psellos consciously appropriates here the motif of shameful nakedness of Noah. But while Jacob’s Biblical counterpart sleeps dead, Jacob is still drinking, even when drowned in alcoholic stupor:

Reclining on your bed on your back,
With your chest and neck stripped naked,
And your thigh naked up to your genitals, you are farting,
Measuring out the inputs with outputs, and
*Dissipating badly what you have gathered.*²²⁰

The strophe is ripe with other Biblical allusions, which do not refer directly to the story of Noah’s drunkenness and which further distance Jacob from the Biblical ideals. The phrase καὶ γυμνώσας ... τὸν τράχηλον seems to be a distant recollection of *Habakkuk* 3:13, in which God strips naked the enemy of Israel and its people (ἐξήγειρας δεσμούς ἕως τραχήλου).²²¹ This assertion is even more credible, if we look at the verse 38 in *In Iacobum* which, on top of being a direct quotation from *Matthew* 12:30, might also be a far reminiscence of the imagery from *Habakkuk* 3:10,²²² whereas the image of a running deer from the fourth strophe of the ode in question alludes again to the third chapter of *Habakkuk*.²²³

All the Biblical allusions play a twofold function. On the one hand Psellos as an author of a *kanon*, was expected to refer to the biblical literary prototypes of the odes, the *Nine Canticles*.²²⁴ Whereas on the other hand, all of these intertextual links situate Jacob as an openly un-Christian type. It becomes clear if we turn to the verse quoted from *Matthew* 12:30. The words quoted here by Psellos are uttered by Jesus himself and pertain to Satan who

²¹⁸ Ibid. 101–104: Στέψον τὴν κάραν σου ταῖς δάφναις, / ἐπενδύθητι / καὶ δέρματα δορκάδων, / καὶ τοὺς θύρσους κινῶν / τῷ Διονύσῳ κράζε· / ‘εὖ υἱς ἄτ[ις], βρόμιε, / βοτρυοῦχε, ληνοβάτα.’

²¹⁹ Psellos most probably knew Demosthenes’ speech, in *On the Names of the Laws* 109–110 he comments quite extensively on the ritual shout “ὕις ἄττις.” However, unlike Demosthenes, who quotes this ritual formula as ὕις ἄττις, he uses the forms with iota and acutus on the penultimate syllable, cf. *Suda* α 4355.

²²⁰ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 33–38: Ἀναπесὼν ὕπτιος ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης σου / καὶ γυμνώσας στήθος καὶ τὸν τράχηλον / καὶ τὸν μηρὸν ἄχρι τῆς αἰδοῦς πίνεις ἀνενδότως, ἴσως καὶ πέρδεις, ἰάκωβε, / ἐξόδοις τὰς εἰσόδους ἐκμετρῶν παραχρῆμα / καὶ σκορπίζων κακῶς ἃ συνήγαγες.

²²¹ Another way of distancing Jacob from the model of godly, pious life.

²²² ... σκορπίζων ὕδατα πορείας αὐτοῦ.

²²³ *Habakkuk* 3:19, NIV transl. “The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.” The image is related to *Psalms* 18:34: “He makes my feet like hinds’ feet, and sets me upon my high places”

²²⁴ The third ode of Psellos’ *kanon* is therefore modelled on the Fourth Biblical Canticle, i.e. the prayer of *Habakkuk*, *Habakkuk* 3:1–19.

destroys the godly order of the world.²²⁵ The Biblical image of a swift-footed deer originally refers to God who enables his flock to escape from their enemies. Jacob, on the contrary, like a chased deer hastens to gulp down all the springs of wine (v. 51–53: ὡς ἔλαφος ἀνενδότης τρέχεις ἐλαυνόμενος πάσας πιεῖν οἴνου τὰς πηγὰς). Thus, by associating such a destructive set of behaviours with Jacob, Psellos again allusively associates him with the openly ungodly comportment.

It is also interesting to note that Psellos purportedly uses the cognates of the verb θλίβω (to squeeze, to press) in the depictions of Jacob's consumption of wine.²²⁶ Conca noticed that wine and vine-related symbolism was frequently used in the patristic literature to emphasize the mission of the Church.²²⁷ Simultaneously, θλίβω is regularly used in the *Bible* to denote violent behaviour as well as physical oppression.²²⁸ From this perspective, Jacob can be perceived as an individual who is overtly hostile to the institution of the Church. Furthermore, contracting (θλίβειν) one's stomach in order to appease its consumptive urges was one of the main precepts of ascetic treatises.²²⁹ Instead of doing so, Jacob squeezes wine directly into his gut and is unable to satiate it.

Yet, this complex literary play does not end here. Psellos skillfully conforms the crude iambic physicality with Biblical literary imagery, thus again he employs a comic strategy of defying the expectations of the audience. Lying naked on his bed, Jacob farts and soils himself, but the very act of soiling is expressed in extremely euphemistic Biblical terms, for he "measures out the inputs with the outputs" (ἐξόδους τὰς εἰσόδους ἐκμετρῶν). At the same time, it is clear Jacob's intake and outtake of potation is constant. The imagery employed in the third strophe of the ode is equally euphemistic. Here, Jacob is cast into a form of a vine which is rich in fruit and leaks wine like a porous wine-skin through his bodily cavities. Psellos consciously operates here on the verge of disgust. The ασκός-/γαστήρ-motif introduces once more physicality which is expressed in the already encountered delicate and figurative terms: dripping (στάζω), pouring out "sweats" (ιδρώτας γὰρ ἐκχέεις) and leaking (ὡς ἀσκός διαρρέυσας).²³⁰ Last but not least, presenting Jacob as a vine tree is once more a play on the Biblical motif mentioned earlier in the article. The overtone of this metaphor is clear: Jacob is to be treated as God's enemy, as a vine which was not planted by the Lord and must be cut off by him.

The last two of Jacob's anti-Biblical guises (anti-Jonah and anti-Azariah) in the *kanon* revolve around already familiar imagery and comic poetics: again, the consumptive features of iambic discourse are forged into one set of images with strictly Biblical motifs. Surprisingly enough, Psellos achieves this effect again, by dwelling on the belly-related imagery. The story of the swallowing of Jonah by the sea monster is introduced in *In Iacobum* according to the standard generic precepts: the prayer of Jonah (*Jonah* 2:2–9) belonged after all to the corpus of the *Nine Biblical Canticles*, and it reemerges in the second and the fourth odes of the *kanon*. The second ode begins with another conspicuous intertext to the *Bible*, more specifically to *I Kings* 2:1: ... ἐστερεώθη ἡ καρδία μου (*In Iacobum* 17: σταθῆρὸς τὴν καρδίαν). The quotation

²²⁵ *Matthew* 12:30 ὁ μὴ ὦν μετ' ἐμοῦ κατ' ἐμοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μὴ συνάγων μετ' ἐμοῦ σκορπίζει. *NIV* translation: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

²²⁶ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 3: καὶ βοτρυῶν ἐκθλίψει; 11: ἀποθλίβει τὸν οἶνον; 100: τῶν βοτρυῶν ἐκθλιβέντων.

²²⁷ CONCA, "La lingua e lo stile" 195 cf. Psellos, *In Iacobum* 93–96.

²²⁸ See for instance *Psalms* 3:1, 27:2, 41:10, 55:2, 71:42, 42:9; *Lamentations* 1:17, 1:20; *Isaiah* 19:20. 51:13; *Job* 20:22.

²²⁹ Climacus, *Divine Ladder* 868.13: Θλίβε κοιλίαν, καὶ πάντως κλείσεις καὶ στόμα· νευροῦται γὰρ γλῶσσα ὑπὸ πλήθους ἐδεσμάτων. Πυκτεύων πύκτευε αὐτῇ [πρὸς αὐτήν], καὶ νήφων νήφε αὐτῇ ...

²³⁰ Again, Psellos uses the comic strategies of mixing high and low and defying expectations.

refers to the episode which recounts the last speech of David which was addressed to his son, Solomon. In his address Solomon is urged by the dying king to be “steadfast in his heart” and to follow the ten commandments. Jacob, of course, is steadfast, but only when it comes to emptying *pithoi* and wine-vats, which “stream directly into his gut” (πίθους ρέοντας ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ σου). The entire second ode is built once again upon the contrast between Jacob’s ungodly comportment as opposed to the sets of behaviours which were expected of him as a Christian and a monk. Instead of attending the morning service, the ὄρθροι, when the *kanones* were sung, Jacob tends to lay ‘canonically’ in his bed and inebriate himself.²³¹

The theme of Jacob’s drunkenness is explored by Psellos in this ode by resorting to the already familiar belly- (γαστήρ, κοιλία as well as the concepts of emptiness and abyss: κενουμένους, κenoίς) and water-related imagery (γαστήρ, κοιλία, θάλασσα). Again, by doing so, Psellos forges an intertextual link to the sixth Biblical Canticle (*Jonah* 2:2–9). Poetic climax is reached together with the introduction of Jonah’s story in the verse 29–32:

You have become a greater Jonah among us, o father,
Since you spend the time of your life in the belly of [your] *pithos*,
Singing unceasingly not “Redeem me!” father,
But “Immerse me in the ruin of drunkenness!”

To be sure, the μείζων Ἰωνᾶς is a neat pun on Jacob’s ‘broad belly’ (πλατεῖα γαστήρ) mentioned earlier in the verse 23. Yet, μείζων points not only to the physical qualities of Jacob. Whilst Jonah spent only three days in the abysmal belly of a sea creature, Jacob spends his entire life in “the belly of the *pithos*” (ἐν τῇ τοῦ πίθου γαστρὶ). Unlike his Biblical counterpart from the *Sixth Canticle*, Jacob does not pray to God to deliver him from these dire straits. Quite conversely, he even begs to be “immersed in the ruin of drunkenness”!

Together with Jonah, Psellos introduces several other *topoi* into the *kanon*. Firstly, it serves as a springboard to explore the already discussed episode of the drunkenness of Noah. Indeed, the word ἄπαυστα might be read as a veiled allusion to Noah, whose name was associated with the cognates of the verb παύω.²³² As Jensen moreover noted, the scenes of Jonah being swallowed by the sea creature, being vomited and thereafter reclining in a relieved state under a vine tree naked on the land were “among the most popular images in early Christian art.”²³³ All of these images are further replicated and used by Psellos in the third ode, where Noah’s story is mentioned.

Jonah, just as Noah, is used subversively by Psellos in order to introduce iambic physiology and map it onto Biblical imagery. This can be gleaned from the fourth ode, where Psellos quotes *Jonah* 2:3²³⁴:

A roar can be heard *from the depths of your gut*, Jacob,
From the *pithos* of your belly;
And a wine-jar which was filled to the brim
Yielded you, o all-honourable!

Psellos once more plays with the traditional comic techniques of defying expectations and mixing high and low elements. Whereas the roar (κραυγή) in the Biblical story is emitted by

²³¹ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 25: νόμος ἔστι σοι ... κανονικῶς κείμενος. Psellos ironically plays in this verse and strophe with the noun κανών, using it as both self-aware literary pun on the genre and on the fact that Jacob is breaking a set of monastic rules (κανόνες).

²³² ANAGNOSTAKIS–PAPAMATSORAKIS, “Εκμανής νέος Βάκχος” 233.

²³³ R. M. JENSEN, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual and Theological Dimensions*. Grand Rapids 2012 154.

²³⁴ NIV: “From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry”; ...ἐκ κοιλίας ᾄδου κραυγῆς μου ἤκουσας φωνῆς μου.

Jonah and refers to his vigorous prayers to God, in case of Jacob, it denotes the sound of his belly which was upset due to copious consumption of alcohol. Yet, this iambic motif which is expressed in the form of Biblical picture goes even further.

Already in the *Bible* (*Matthew* 12:39–40) the story of Jonah’s rescue by the hands of God is perceived as a prefiguration of the resurrection of Christ. The three days which were spent by Jonah in the belly of the sea-monster were traditionally understood as a figure of three days in which Christ was locked in the cave—it was believed that Jonah had delved into the abyss of death (Hades) and had reemerged alive.²³⁵ Despite the fact that the connection can be found rarely in the extant medieval literature, it is present in Psellos’ *Theologica* 45.²³⁶ As Jensen added, the connection of the belly, where Jonah plunged (κοιλία, γαστήρ) with both death and rebirth, found its counterpart in the very shape of baptistery, which traditionally looked like a hollow womb (γαστήρ),²³⁷ and it is such a baptismal imagery to which Psellos points indirectly by his frequent use of the noun κοιλία.

Surely, Psellos separates again Jacob from his biblical ‘type:’ as we have seen, unlike Jonah, he does not want to be saved, his is solely interested in destruction. Thus, it becomes clear why Psellos so persistently associates him with Hades: Jacob is as insatiable and as destructive as death.²³⁸ Additionally, the watery baptismal motifs aligned to the story of Jonah are again associated with Jacob’s repulsive consumptive physiology:

You flood your bed with weeping,
and you are baptised with baptism every day:
Your belly cannot hold wine, father,
And leaks it through all the pipes in your body.²³⁹

If we consider the first verse through the lenses of its original context (*Psalms* 6:7), it becomes clear that Psellos operates almost on the verge of blasphemy. Physiological outpours are described again in strictly Biblical terms. Even more strikingly, the Psalmist in the *Psalms* 6 assumes an utterly supplicatory stance. He is in pain and affliction, aware of his sin and humbled by his suffering he begs God for forgiveness:

I am worn out from my groaning.
All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.
My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.²⁴⁰

The mournful tone of this psalm is emphasized by its title, which suggests that the melody which accompanies it should be played by an eight-stringed lyre, which resonated with low bass melody in tune with a solemn lament. Another biblical intertext present in the second verse of the discussed strophe of Psellos’ *kanon* (v. 110), also conveys such a mournful tone.

²³⁵ JENSEN, *Baptismal Imagery* 154–155.

²³⁶ Psellos, *Theologica* 45: Ὁ μὲν γὰρ τύπος πρὸς οὐδὲν ὀφείλει ἐναντιοῦσθαι ὃ δὴ τύπος ἐστίν, ὁ δὲ ἀντίτυπος ἐναντίωσιν ἔχει πρὸς τὸ ἐσόμενον πρόδηλον. οἷόν τι φημι, τύπος τοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ταφέντος καὶ ἀναστάντος Χριστοῦ ὁ Ἰωνᾶς γέγονεν. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto* 14.32.

²³⁷ JENSEN, *Baptismal Imagery* 154.

²³⁸ Mouth and belly in both Biblical and grotesque traditions were normally associated with death (see my discussion of Andronikos in ch. 3).

²³⁹ Psellos, *In Iacobum* 109–112: Δάκρυσι πλύνεις σου τὴν κλίνην / καὶ βαπτίσματι βαπτίζῃ καθ’ ἡμέραν· / ἡ γαστήρ σου καὶ γὰρ τὸν οἶνον μὴ χωροῦσα / δι’ ὀχετῶν τοῦ σώματος ἀποβλύζει τοῦτον, πάτερ.

²⁴⁰ *Psalms* 6:7–8: ἐκοπίασα ἐν τῷ στεναγμῷ μου, λούσω καθ’ ἐκάστην νύκτα τὴν κλίνην μου, ἐν δάκρυσίν μου τὴν στρωμνὴν μου βρέξω. ἐταράχθη ἀπὸ θυμοῦ ὁ ὀφθαλμός μου, ἐπαλαιώθην ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐχθροῖς μου. Cf. Homer *Odyssey* 17.102–103: λέξομαι εἰς εὐνήν, ἥ μοι στονόεσσα τέτυκται, αἰεὶ δάκρυς ἑμοῖσι πεφυρμένη.

In the Gospel, Jesus addresses his students, explaining that they cannot take part in the “cup” of his sufferings: “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”²⁴¹

The technique, which Psellos chose to employ here is already familiar. He strips the original quotations out of their mournful and ‘sanctified’ context and appropriates them into strictly iambic aesthetics. Rude consumption and crude physiology is once again expressed in euphemistic terms, but the image is vivid enough and there is no doubt that both baptism and tears stand as euphemisms for soiling oneself: the only baptisms that Jacob takes are connected to his inebriation and bodily outpours. Yet, these baptisms, procured with wine, do not cleanse his sinful soul:

You are drinking according to the rule, great Jacob,
Drawing up undiluted black wine,
And [drawing] measures of neat wine,
You [sate] the senses of your body and soul:
You baptize ten of them, all day and night,
Though none of them are purified.²⁴²

The motifs of baptisms, death and resurrection are subversively continued in another and last set of images connected, this time, to the story of Azariah from *Daniel* 3.²⁴³ The connection is established through a series of intertextual links: the *hirmoi* of the sixth and seventh odes are overt hint to the story from the Old Testament: ὥδῃ ζ' Παῖδες Ἑβραίων,²⁴⁴ ὥδῃ ζ' Ἑπταπλασίως κάμινον.²⁴⁵ The biblical story of God’s deliverance of the three brothers from the furnace was, similarly to Jonah, perceived as a prefiguration of Christ’s resurrection.²⁴⁶ It also accentuates devotion to God: the brothers are not afraid because, as pious believers, they are certain that they will be rescued by the Lord. But the likeness between Jacob and Azariah is again only superficial:

You trampled under your foot the
Fiery furnace of drunkenness, like another Azariah,
And, without an angel, not being touched by the fire,
You quenched it, o all-wise, by unmixed heavy drinking.

The two middle verses (106–107) are direct reminiscences of *Dan.* 3:49–50. Yet, Jacob is nothing like his third Biblical counterpart: instead of being pious, he leads sinful and carnal life marked by gluttony and sloth. He quenches the fire of his thirst without the help of God (ἀγγέλου χωρίς), but through gulping down neat wine.

²⁴¹ *Matthew* 20:22: ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐκ οἶδατε τί αἰτεῖσθε. δύνασθε πιεῖν τὸ ποτήριον ὃ ἐγὼ πίνω, ἢ τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθῆναι.

²⁴² Psellos, *In Iacobum* 39–44: Κανονικῶς πίνεις ὁ μέγας Ἰάκωβος, / οἶνον τάξας μέλανα καὶ ἄκρατον / καὶ μετρητὰς ἀκράτου ποτοῦ / κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος / τὰς δέκα γὰρ βαπτίζεις ἐν ἐνὶ νυχθημέρῳ. CONCA, “La lingue e lo stile” 194 remarked that both τάξας and κανονικῶς might as well allude to monastic obedience, which Jacob notoriously breaks.

²⁴³ Two parts of *Daniel* 3 constituted Sixth and Seventh Canticle: “The Prayer of the Three Holy Children” (*Daniel* 3:26–56), and “The Song of the Three Holy Children” (*Daniel* 3:57–88).

²⁴⁴ *Daniel* 3:93, 3:95; cf. Psellos *Poem* 54: 736.

²⁴⁵ *Daniel* 3:19, 3:22, 3:46. The adverb refers to the furnace into which the three brothers were supposed to be cast, and which was supposed to be seven times hotter than usual.

²⁴⁶ Of course, this is a play on the Biblical symbolism of the numbers 3 and 7.

2.8. Conclusion

Throughout the chapter I have been attempting to show how Psellos adapted the insulting language of *iambos* in his two invectives and used it in the performative setting of the eleventh-century literary contests (λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες). I have shown how Psellos subverted the poetic form of a religious kanon by introducing crude iambic physicality and expressing it with the terms and quotations drawn from the Biblical tradition. Of course, Psellos is careful enough not to be accused of blasphemy himself, all the Biblical images do not touch upon doctrinal matters and are used merely to mock and Jacob as an evil drunkard who endangers the monastic community and whose poetic skills do not match these of Psellos. In doing so, Psellos exhibits his conscious urge to innovate and transgress generic boundaries. At the very same time, his invectives are perfect examples of how iambic discourse was appropriated by Byzantine literati. With this in mind, let us turn another interesting example of the employment of the iambic insult in a changed social setting of the twelfth century.

2.9. Appendix:

Ode 1: “[You sank] the chariot-running [Pharaoh]”

Drunkenness carousals and singing, are your festival, o Jacob,
and the shouts of the fellow drinkers, and jokes, and lasciviousness,
and dances and cymbals, and squeezing out bunches of grapes,
And pressing them with feet, and the guts filled with wine-jars.

Yearning for luxuries, o Jacob, you scorned
All ascetic practices: firstly self-control,
Next, sleeping on the ground, the austerity of life,
the prayer, the tears, and the elevation to God, o father.

O good Jacob of the Synkellos monastery is beyond all miracles:
Just as another wine-vat [he] takes [in] the bunches of grapes,
And pressing [them] together in the throat, he squeezes out wine
To his stomach as if to a *barrel*, without the need of decanting.

Even the poisonous snake yields you Jacob, you insatiable animal!
Burning [with] fever which is not quenched by the drink,
Conflagration that cannot be endured and parched land,
Just like Hades or sea, [but] you will not fill your stomach through drinking.

a. Ode 2: “The heavenly disk”

With steady heart and shameless soul,
you were seen drinking unmixed wine fearlessly:
[truly], you were not scared neither by the emptied-out vessels,
nor by the *wine-jars* streaming [directly] to your gut.

Even though God, the creator of all, filled the abyss full,
And *filled up* the cavities of the sea with water,
He would not fill your broad stomach, father,
Which, like a sewer, admits everything in its abyss.

It is in your custom, father, that whilst you lie in bed
for the most part of your life, to drink as you were not made of flesh:
for this reason, mornings and midnights
have seen you drunk and gluttoned so many times.

For us you have become better than Jonah, father,
Since you spend the time of your life in the belly of the wine-jar,
Singing unceasingly not “Redeem me”, father,
But “immerse me in the ruin of drunkenness.”

b. Ode 3: "You are my fish, o Lord"

Reclining on your bed on your back,
With your chest and neck stripped naked
And your thigh naked up to your genitals and, [in like manner], you fart,
Measuring out the inputs with outputs and
Dissipating badly what you have gathered.

You are drinking according to the rule, great Jacob,
Drawing up undiluted black wine,
And taking measures of neat drink,
You satiate the senses of your body and soul:
You baptize ten of them, once every night and day,
Though none of them are purified.

You have been seen on the earth, [as] a grape vine, full of fruits,
Dropping with wine, the heaviest one from every side,
From the throat, from the eyes,
From the "back door", from the entire body of yours.
For you are pouring out [not] sweats, but strong wine,
As though it were leaking through your skin, Jacob.

When you your heart is stricken with a missile,
You run away unyieldingly, like a hunted deer,
To slurp all the springs of wine:
You gulp down all the wine-vats and wine-jars, [o] insatiable,
And neither Nile nor the sea could quench your thirst, father Jacob.

Ode 4: "So that you might save me"

Despite that you hadn't planted the grape vines,
you gathered many of them, father,
And not having squeezed their bunches
with your feet, you drunk entire vats of them,
you do not add water to your bowl of strong wine,
but you amazingly gulp it down.

Even though you have given drowsiness to your brows,
You have not given repose to your belly,
You drink all nights, as if you were disembodied,
You rejoice your heart with the business of drunkenness,
Laughing intemperately to [your] untempered wine.

A roar can be heard from your gut, Jacob,
In the belly of your wine-jar,
And a wine-jar which was filled to the brim
Yielded you, o all-honourable:

and once you are full of drunkenness, you send out
Belches, [howling] sour fumes and winds.

You have subdued to your flesh,
Being curbed in this way, you frequent to symposia,
you burdened it like a female slave with heavy wine-jars filled with neat wine,
you compelled it entirely to drunkenness and intemperance
and it yielded you, father Jacob.

Ode 5: "Expiate me"

With one gulp, you emptied ten cups,
And, taking in additional breath, you [dried up] a twenty-metres wineskin;
Now all that is to you, Jacob, is, having widened your mouth,
To gulp down the [entire] sea.

Diamonds and iron cede to drops,
Even the stones are hollowed out by constant dripping,
But the emptied barrels did not blunt
Your insatiable stomach.

You quench the terribly growing appetite, father Jacob,
Filling your cup of neat wine
with cold [water], you put to sleep your swelling anger,
and you overcome your passions, o most clever one.

Do not come near my grape vines, father Jacob,
Do not cut off my bunches of grapes, do not tread them out:
[for] like a dry sponge you draw up wine
through all parts of your body.

Ode 6 "O children of the Hebrews"

You were seen as a *kanon* and a standard, o father,
For the drunkards, not mixing your wine
Or blunting it by a measure of water,
But you used it as if it gushed out of squeezed grapes.

You trampled under your foot the
Fiery furnace of drunkenness, as another Azarias,
And, without angel, not being touched by the fire,
You quenched it, o all-wise, by unmixed heavy drinking.

Adorn your head with laurel leaves,
Wrap yourself with a deer skin,
And moving your thyrsus, raise a cry to Dionysos:
"Eu, hyis attis! Bromios, grape-holder, threader of the wine-vats!"

You wash your bed with tears and with baptismal water,
For you are baptized every day:
Your belly cannot hold wine, father,
And it leaks it through the pipes of your body.

Ode 7: "The sevenfold furnace"

Your face grew the best grapes, Jacob,
Gushing forth various types of wine:
Chian through your eyes, Pramenian through the jaws,
Flowery scented through the pipes of your brows,
Kian through your lips, and through your mouth, father,
sweet-smelling and black-coloured ones.

Lying on your bed throughout the night, you fulfil your *kanon*,
Rejoicing at the wine-vat of your flesh, Jacob.
Having stored [all] wine-vats, bowls and goblets,
You drink all night long and you speak of it vauntingly:
"Like a tavern-keeper, I have not mixed water into wine,
Neither cold nor warm, I draw it neat."

Like a most clever household keeper, sensible and prudent,
You stored up for the autumn everywhere
vessels full of good wine, Jacob,
Having reclined on your bed straight away,
With careless heart and untroubled life,
You drink all the time, o wonderful host!

I will arrange now your body as an ingenious wineskin,
Having assessed its intakes and outlets:
For receiving the crop, you discharge it at once,
And your belly is never filled.
Just as the sea, which takes in river, father,
And remains/happens to be equal through *its design*.

Ode 8: "The heaven will shrink on seeing this"

You fastened your feet in a wine vat,
You have your hands in bunches of grapes,
And you send your glances to the wineskins, wise father.
Having fixed your mouth at the bottom of a huge vessel, you drink like a bull:
Not having taken breath at all, without any effort at all,
You lift it up like a tide.

You astound angelic orders in heaven,
And human souls on the earth,

Because, having fixed your lips on the wineskins,
gulping down unmixed wine, you stare like a bull,
And drinking ceaselessly up to the dregs, father,
without wearing out one breath.

Even though you do not know ascetic rules,
You have proved yourself to be ascetic.
Exercising a truly ascetic asceticism, o all-wise;
For you trained [yourself] ascetically by emptying many *askoi*,
[and] you took part in the contests of asceticism in your life,
since you took hold of all the *askoi*.

We shall put the wreaths of vine-grapes
On your head, father Jacob,
And we shall hang skilfully bunches of grapes on your ears,
And we shall attach *askoi* filled with wine around your neck,
And we shall shout vigorously "Drinking unceasingly,
You shamefully pillory yourself."

3. CONSUMPTIVE AND VERBAL EXCESSES OF THE KOMNENIAN ERA

With the following chapter, we turn to the Byzantine Empire of the Komnenian era. The period, due to its vastly prolific literary production in almost every possible genre and the unprecedented volume of interest in the literary heritage of Ancient Greece was labelled by Anthony Kaldellis as the era of the 'Third Sophistic.'²⁴⁷ Just like during the earlier period of Michael Psellos, the literary salons of Constantinople θέατρα continued to play a vital role in the lively urban setting of the Queen of the Cities.²⁴⁸ However, the stake of the literary competitions changed drastically. With the seizure of imperial power of the members of the Komnenian clan, which was marked by the enthronement of Alexios I Komnenos in 1081, there occurred a deep modification in the structure of the highest strata of Byzantine society. In an attempt to curb the excesses characteristic of the previous imperial régime, Alexios I Komnenos commended all of the most important imperial posts solely to the member of the Komnenian clan.²⁴⁹ The consequences of this decision were far flung. As a result, the governing classes, in which the literati had played crucial role up to this point, were split into two almost impenetrable entities. Komnenian régime quickly devised an entire system of the imperial titles, which could only be bestowed upon the member of the clan. In consequence, the access to the highest administrative posts in the empire was limited to the members of the Komnenian family.

What it meant for the educated élites from outside of the imperial clan was of crucial importance. Unlike Psellos and the intellectuals of his times, the Komnenian literati were no longer able to reach the highest imperial ranks. What they competed for, dissimilar to their counterparts in the eleventh century, were the middle ranks in the imperial order, or, put in cruder terms: survival and the money to live by. The booming interest in the literature of ancient Greece as well as the rise in the number of educated people in Constantinople meant that the competition among the literati was fierce. The wealthy patrons who were willing to sponsor literary endeavors were few, while the group of those who were striving for a rich patron was numerous.²⁵⁰

For most of the Byzantine authors in the twelfth century writing and speaking was not merely a pastime,²⁵¹ but a means for making for a living. Of course, as is always the case with any other competitive business, some were more successful than the others. Hence, to oversimplify slightly, what one ate basically depended to a considerable degree on how well one exhibited one's literary skill in writing and more importantly, during the live and public

²⁴⁷ KADELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 225–316.

²⁴⁸ For the extensive studies of the Late Antique/Byzantine θέατρα see M. GRUNBART (ed.) *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter/Rhetorical Culture In Late Antiquity And The Middle Ages*. Berlin–New York 2007.

²⁴⁹ Of course, the idea which stood behind the move was to ensure the unity of the ruling classes: P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel Komnenos*, 180–201; KADELLIS, *Hellenism* 233–241. For the discussion of this change as opposed to the earlier periods of the eleventh century see also Bernard, *Writing and Reading* 10: "I believe that many of the observations cannot be valid for other periods, since before 1025 and after 1081 imperial authority was based on different premises, and the intellectual elite had a different place in society." Also see the subsequent discussion *ibid.* 10–17.

²⁵⁰ For the system of patronage under the Komnenoi see M. MULLETT, "Aristocracy and patronage in the literary circles of Komnenian Constantinople," in EADEM, *Letters, literacy and literature in Byzantium* Pt. VIII. Burlington 2007, 173–201.

²⁵¹ Nicholas Mesarites whose account of the coup of John Komnenos the Fat is discussed in chapter 4, is, at least to some part, an exception to this rule. For this see M. ANGOLD. *Nicholas Mesarites. His life and works (in translation)*. Edinburgh 2017, 1–31.

deliveries, which took place in the literary salons, or during the official addresses delivered on the important secular and religious occasions. To be sure, the twelfth-century Byzantine society was a performative culture and most of the produced texts were meant to be delivered in public. The better an author managed to exhibit their literary skill, the more likely they were to allure the interest of a potential patron and earn money.

3.1. Literary Cuisines of The Komnenian Era

If one's sustenance depended largely on a broadly understood production of letters, then it should not come as a surprise that one of the most persistent motifs of the twelfth-century literary works equates culinary and literary skills. I have discussed this junction of food/drink and production of words in the previous chapter, where Psellos associates the clumsy poetic output of Jacob with an unpleasantly sour Pramnian wine. Certainly, the *τόπος* itself dates to the times of ancient Greek literature. The authors of the Old Athenian Comedy obsessively focused on the consumptive habits of the greedy politicians/public speakers: what and how one ate in the Old Comic plays was directly mapped on how one spoke. Similarly, the sophistic speechifying and oral flattery are frequently equated in Platonic dialogues with satisfying the base pleasures produced by human belly.²⁵² Worman showed how Socrates in Plato's dialogues exhibits how the oral *κολακεία* (flattery) of the sophists produces pleasures (*ἡδονή*) and satisfies (*χαρίζεσθαι*) the base desires of the listeners.²⁵³ For instance, in *Protagoras* Socrates likens the sophistic orators to shopkeepers who are peddling the comestibles and hoodwink their quality.²⁵⁴

Similarly, Aristotle perceives human tongue as an organ which always needs to be constrained. It is responsible for mutually connected functions, namely the production of speech and consumption of foodstuffs. Both functions need to be held under constant control. Just as the intake of food can easily lead to *ἀκολασία*, as the sensation which is roused by it is seemingly close to sexual satisfaction,²⁵⁵ the verbal persuasion, which takes frequent recourse to images of things which can be touched or tasted, rouses bodily pleasure in the listeners.²⁵⁶ Still, perhaps the best ancient Greek witness to the equation of the literary art and the art of cooking are the *Deipnosophists* of Athenaeus, which is the most extended literary discussion of every conceivable aspect of consumption. It spans from the preparation of food, through the catalogues of various vessels and tableware, the appetites of various people to the consumptive excesses of mythical heroes, kings and otherwise unknown individuals. The *Deipnosophists* ultimately link literary and culinary arts into one.

Such a 'comic' discourse of the banquet of words was continued in the late antiquity and the introduction to the sixth-century collection of epigrams arranged by Agathias of Myrina, might serve as an excellent example of the survival and development of this *τόπος*.²⁵⁷ Agathias opens the cycle of collected epigrams with a 'dedicatory' iambic poem, which is

²⁵² WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 153–212.

²⁵³ Ibid. 294.

²⁵⁴ Plato, *Protagoras* 313d.

²⁵⁵ See for instance the widely quoted story of a glutton who wished to possess neck as long as crane's in order to feel the pleasure of eating for a little longer, Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1118b.

²⁵⁶ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 185; Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1370a; 1406a.

²⁵⁷ Interestingly enough, Agathias' cycle of epigrams is preserved in two eleventh-century manuscripts, Pal gr. 356 and Par. suppl. gr. 690: G. ROCHEFORT, "Une anthologie grecque du XIe siècle, le Parisinus suppl. gr. 690," *Scriptorium* 4 (1950), 3–17.

addressed to a gluttonous ‘banqueters.’²⁵⁸ Having just had too good a share in the banquet of words (τῶν λόγων πανδαισία), they are now suffering from the unpleasant consequences of excessive eating. They are sitting and belching (ἐρυγγάνειν), stuffed to the full with all kinds of extravagancies (τῇ τρυφῇ σεσαγμένοι).²⁵⁹ There is more of good stuff coming for them, since the author himself has prepared some novel dishes out of ‘new seasonings,’²⁶⁰ which comprise not only of his own literary produce, but also from the dainty meals (τοῖς ἐκείνων πέμμασι), of his own literary colleagues in small portions, just enough to taste.²⁶¹ Without a doubt, the language of these humorous verses which revolve around consumptive excess is firmly grounded in the language of iambic poetry and Old Comic tradition, and Agathias does it with a clear intent. By inviting his fellow writer-colleagues to the luxurious banquets of words, he carves the identity of his own group in a direct opposite to the social discourse, which prevailed at that very time. After all, Agathias was one of the last ‘pagan’ intellectuals of late Antiquity who operated in the Christianized society, where luxury, gluttony and excess, gourmandizing and bodily pleasures were straightforwardly condemned.²⁶²

The association of τέχνη ῥητορική (understood broadly as literary production) with τεχνὴ μαγειρική (the art of cooking) was explored in the later periods of Byzantine literature. The vast material of tenth-century *Suda* lexicon preserved a significant number of instances (via the large body of quotations from ancient comic tradition) of this equation. Even before the times of Psellos and his intellectual milieu, the acts of speaking and emitting words were usually associated with the production of either tasty or spiteful meals which were supposed to be consumed by the listeners. The dialogic exchange of iambic insults by the tenth-century intellectuals, John Geometres and Stylianos, might be evoked here as an interesting case in point here.²⁶³ The exact circumstances of the literary exchange are not fully known, but the short iambic pieces of insults are preserved in a manuscript in a form of sequence where they answer each other step by step (forming eight brief parts: five by Geometres, three by his opponent).

A number of mouth-centered iambic themes might be identified in them: they both accuse each other for either ‘vomiting depravity’ (ἐξεμεῖ μοχθηρίαν), or ‘gushing forth the streams of nonsense’ (ῥοῦν ἐκκενοῖ ληρημάτων).²⁶⁴ More than that, both Geometres and Stylianos are trying to discard their opponent by showing that their literary output is of no worth whatsoever and, in doing so, they reach out to the tradition of Old Comedy. Thus, John compares Stylianos to a dung-beetle, a κάρθαρς well-known from Aristophanic *Peace*, since his speeches are composed after the manner of a ball of dung (κόπρου πόλος), an incoherent nonsense, which is ‘inedible’.²⁶⁵ Stylianos is not far behind John in this iambic exchange: it is John’s lips that are full of dung are full of dung (πάντως κόπρῳ κρατοῦσι τῶν σῶν χειλέων).

²⁵⁸ *Palatine Anthology* IV.3.1–41. An excellent discussion of this dedicatory piece has been recently proposed by S.D. SMITH, *Greek Epigram and Byzantine Culture. Gender, Desire, and Denial in the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge 2019 (forthcoming).

²⁵⁹ Cf. three other epigrams written by Agathias, which were supposedly inscribed on a wall of a public chalet in Smyrna and which treat about painful defecation which resulted from gluttony: *Palatine Anthology* IX.642–644.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 19–20: Καὶ πρὸς γε τούτῳ δεῖπνον ἡρανισμένον / ἦκω προθήσων ἐκ νέων ἡδυσμάτων.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² For the discussion of Agathias as one of last ‘true’ heirs of classical tradition see A. KALDELLIS, “Things are not What They Are: Agathias Mythistoricus and the Last Laugh of Classical Culture.” *Classical Quarterly* 53.1 (2003), 295–300. The function of the comic excess as directly opposed to Christian ideas of moderation see SMITH, *Greek Epigram*.

²⁶³ I. VAN OPSTALL, “The pleasure of mudslinging.”

²⁶⁴ Verses 5 and 10; VAN OPSTALL, “Pleasure of Mudslinging” 775.

²⁶⁵ *Dialogue*, 6–10.

Thus, it is suggested, he had better closed them and ended serving this unsavory dish,²⁶⁶ and he is nothing more than a proverbially ugly and verbally abusive Thersites.²⁶⁷ As we can see, just as the dish prepared by the hands of an unschooled cook can easily turn to a sickening meal, just the words uttered by an untrained speaker and/or used with a malicious intent might quickly turn from the proverbial honey to dung. In the second part of this chapter we shall see how these ‘mouthly’ behaviours were explored by the anonymous author of the *Timarion*.

These different aspects of such a consumptive discourse of the ‘feast of words’ were often used and appropriated by the authors of the twelfth century. The epistolary oeuvre of Michael Italikos is an interesting case in point. In one of the letters in the corpus composed around 1118–1133, most probably on receiving the appointment to a post of the teacher of the doctors, Michael addresses his nephew and invites him to a lavish dinner. “Because we have so often participated in the sensual pleasures of the table (αἰσθητὴν τράπεζαν),” he opens his letter, “I deem you worthy of an intellectual feast, my gold nephew.”²⁶⁸ Then, Michael continues:

I invite you to [to join me in] this intellectual banquet, just as we have been doing on each occasion lately, whilst enjoying ourselves with the steaks made out of words.²⁶⁹ For we will taste philosophical deer, medical hare, Median peacock, hymnal partridge, and musical swan;²⁷⁰ and even thing(s) which even the inhabitants of Sybaris were not wont to discover, or not even Aristippos, the daintiest of the philosophers did not even dress, which are lying here gathered together to be tasted to satiety ... And there will not be only one kind (ἰδέα) of the edibles: some of them [will be laid out on] the casserole-dishes, the other [on] the frying-pans, “nor is a casserole-dish a bad thing,” to season my words with the quotation from the *Deipnosophists*, “but a frying-dish is better;”²⁷¹ for the first ones are for the boiled meals, while the latter is for fried ones. Neither the sausages, nor the flat-cakes, nor the milk-cakes shall be missing on the table,²⁷² and you will find a sesame-cake there, as well as the flat-cake à la Gelonios, and generally all those banquets set for Mark Antony by Cleopatra. Then you [will] tell me about your dainty dishes (ὄψα),²⁷³ about fish

²⁶⁶ Ibid. For the discussion of κόπρος in Byzantine invective see VAN OPSTALL, “Pleasure” 781. Certainly, the motif of dung-filled mouth is yet another obscene *topos* drawn from the iambic tradition. WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 17–18; 80, 91 has argued at length how the Old Comic tradition connected both bodily orifices, hence the anus and the mouth and how the comic authors made use of medical knowledge of the 5th and 4th centuries BC, according to which there run a pipe throughout human body, which connected the mouth and the anus. As Worman notes all the ‘standard’ epithets employed by Aristophanes which mention πρωκτός (εὐρύπρωκτος, λακκοπρωκτος) have more to do with speaking, than with possessing ‘vulnerable’ anus. Cf. the already discussed verses in Psellos, *In Sabbaitam* 86–90.

²⁶⁷ *Dialogue*, 29–33.

²⁶⁸ Italikos, *Letter* 18: Καλῶ τοίνυν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν λογικὴν ταυτηνὶ πανδαισίαν, ἣν καθ’ ἐκάστην ποιοῦμαι τοῖς νέοις, εὐφραίνων αὐτοὺς τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων ἐδέσμασιν.

²⁶⁹ The word used here by Italikos, ἔδεσμα, refers both to meal and meat, see *LSJ*.

²⁷⁰ The hare of the medicine certainly points to the low status of the medical profession, since hare is traditionally cowardly.

²⁷¹ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* I.5c. As a matter of fact, the words did not come from Athenaeus himself, but were excerpted by him from a cookbook which was composed by a certain Philoxenos.

²⁷² For more details on these sweets see for instance Tzetzes, *Comm. in Frogs*, 507a.

²⁷³ For the discussion of the set of ideas which stood behind the concept of ὄψον in Classical Athens see: DAVIDSON, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* 3–35; IDEM, “*Opsophagia*: Revolutionary Eating at Athens” in J. Wilkins, D.

which is shaped in the form of birds, and the birds which are reshaped into the form of fish, and all those novel charms and falsehoods of this novel [culinary] craft, over which our belly presides. We shall be washing down these not with Chalybonian wine, not even with the one [which emits] the flowery bouquet; on the contrary, we shall be drinking nectar which the gods, as Homer says, “drink from the golden goblets.”²⁷⁴ You can see that I did not place the culinary art under the scope of medicine, just like Plato did, or rhetoric under the legal art (and surely by doing so I would blaspheme it and state that false praise (κολακεία) is a part of political knowledge, but I mixed cooking with philosophy ...²⁷⁵

Thus, Platos and Pythagorases will be [our] cupbearers, Aristotle and every other Peripatetic will be our *chef de cuisine*, whilst I appointed the Old and the New Academy in a rank of servants to our guests. Should there be any need to cater the desserts to our dear friends, I shall bring forth the novelties of the Stoics and the scepticism of Pyrrho, and I shall also honour my table with the barbaric philosophy, which could be found practiced among the Chaldaeans and the Egyptians. I shall charm them with singing, and subdue them with the enchantments of beaten strings ... There will be the times when the art of the words will surround the membranes of the ears with its wondrous words of the Siren-like Isocrates, of the resounding voice of Demosthenes, of the sweetness of Herodotus, of the solemnity of Thucydides, or as many there are who have breathed forth its melodies ... Such will be the cheer that we will be sharing, such will be our banquet hall ...²⁷⁶

Harvey and M. Dobson (eds.), *Food in Antiquity*. Exeter 1995, 204–213. Also see J. Wilkins, “Social Status and Fish in Greece and Rome” in G. and V. Mars (eds.), *Food Culture and History*, vol. I. London 1993, 191–203.

²⁷⁴ A quotation from *Illiad* IV.3: νέκταρ ... τοῖ δὲ χρυσεῖς δεπάεσσιν.

²⁷⁵ Most probably, Italikos has in mind here the widely quoted excerpt from Plato’s *Gorgias*, where Socrates discusses the interconnection between the art of rhetoric and culinary art (Πῶλος: ταύτῳ ἄρ’ ἐστὶν ὁψοποιία καὶ ῥητορική;), arguing that both are like each other in the sense that they are merely skills, which are taught through practice. For κολακεία and κόλαξ in iambic tradition see my discussion of the literary portrayal of Theodore of Smyrna in this chapter. For a short discussion of rhetoric and culinary art see KOLOVOU, *Die Briefe* 58–60; for a discussion of the conjunction of speaking and eating in Plato’s dialogues see WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 153–212.

²⁷⁶ Michael Italikos, *Letter* 18: Διὰ τὴν καθ’ ἡμᾶς αἰσθητὴν τράπεζαν ἀφ’ ἧς πολλάκις ἐσιτησάμεθα, κύρ Θεόφανες, τῆς λογικῆς ἀξιῶ τραπέζης τὸν χρυσοῦν μοι ἀνεσιόν. Καλῶ τοίνυν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν λογικὴν ταυτηνὶ πανδαισίαν, ἣν καθ’ ἐκάστην ποιούμεαι τοῖς νέοις, εὐφραίνων αὐτοὺς τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων ἐδέεσμαι· ἐνεστι γὰρ τούτοις καὶ ἔλαφος φιλοσοφουμένη καὶ πτώξ φυσιολογούμενος καὶ τῶς Μηδικὸς καὶ πέρδις ὠδικὸς καὶ κύκνος μουσικὸς, καὶ τὸ πλουσιώτατον ὅτι ὅσα οὐδ’ οἱ περὶ τὴν Σύβαριν ἐξηυρήκασιν καὶ ὁπόσα οὐδ’ ὁ τρυφηλότατος τῶν φιλοσόφων Ἀρίστιππος κατηρτύσατο τούτοις εἰς πλησμονὴν ἀθρόα πάντα παράκειται ... ἀλλ’ οὐ μία τίς ἐστὶν ἡ ἰδέα τῶν ἐδεσμάτων· τὰ μὲν γὰρ λοπάδες ἐστί, τὰ δὲ τάγνηνα καὶ οὐθ’ ἡ λοπάς κακὸν ἐστίν, ἵνα τι καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν Δειπνοσοφιστῶν παραρτύσαιμι, καὶ τὸ τάγνηνον ἄριστον, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐφθά, τὰ δ’ ὀπτὰ παρατίθεται· οὐδὲ ἀλλᾶντες, οὐδὲ πλακοῦντες, οὐδ’ ἄμητες τὴν τράπεζαν ἀπολείπουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸν σησαμοῦντα εὐρήσεις ἐνταῦθα καὶ τὸν Γελώνιον πλακοῦντα καὶ ὅλως <τὴν> τῆς Κλεοπάτρας ἐπ’ Ἀντωνίῳ ἐστίασιν. Σὺ δέ μοι λέγε τὰ ὄψα τὰ σά, τοὺς τυραννομένους ἰχθύας εἰς ὄρνιθας καὶ τοὺς ὄρνιθας εἰς ἰχθύας μεταπλαττομένους καὶ τὰ καινὰ ταῦτα τῆς νέας δημιουργίας πλάσματά τε καὶ γοητεύματα, ὧν ἡ κοιλία προκάθεται. Τὸ δὲ ποτὸν ἐκείνοις οὐκ οἶνός ἐστι Χαλυβώνιος, οὐδ’ ἕτερος ἀνθοσμίας, ἀλλ’ ἀντικρυς νέκταρ καὶ οἶον οἱ θεοὶ πίνουσιν ἐν χρυσεῖς δεπάεσσιν. Οἰνοχόοι μὲν ἐνταῦθα Πυθαγόροι καὶ Πλάτωνες, Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ καὶ ὁ σύμπαρ Περίπατος ἀρχιμάγειροι· τὴν δὲ παλαιὰν καὶ τὴν νεωτέραν Ἀκαδημίαν εἰς ὑπηρετοῦ τάξιν τοῖς δαιτυμόσι κατέστησα· δεῖσαν δὲ καὶ τινὰ ἐπιδορπίσματα τοῖς φίλοις ἐπεισαγαγεῖν, τὴν τῶν Στωϊκῶν εἰσάγω καινότητα καὶ τὸ ἀμφιτάλαντον Πύρρωνος καὶ τὰς ἐφέξεις ἢ ἀντιθέσεις αὐτοῦ· ἔστι δ’ ὅτε καὶ τῆς βαρβάρου φιλοσοφίας ὅση Χαλδαίοις καὶ Αἰγυπτίοις ἐξεύρηται φιλοτιμοῦμαι τὴν τράπεζαν καὶ καταυλῶ τοῖς μέλεσι καὶ καταθέλω τοῖς

What we can thus see here, is a witty invitation to a ‘dinner’ of the learned men (δεῖπνον τῶν σοφῶν), where the actual fare that the participants will be sharing with each other will not be physical, but intellectual. Michael plays with his addressee and shapes the topics of the intellectual discussion in the form of the most exquisite dishes, which are very well in line with the tastes of the *nouvelle cuisine* which was enjoyed by the twelfth-century Constantinopolitan elites. The pleasures of the shared literary and intellectual debates will be such that even the daintiest gourmands have never dreamt about such delicacies: the sophist Aristippos (famous for his hedonistic life), or even the inhabitants of the proverbially profligate Sybaris would be envious.²⁷⁷ Michael is careful enough to remind his addressee that despite the fact he seems to be talking about the physical enjoyment of gourmand dishes, they will taste nothing more than pure knowledge. There will be so many kinds (ιδέαι) of meals, but all of them will comprise of intellectual fare only. To be sure, by mixing philosophy (understood as a purely intellectual activity) which deals with ideas, with the τεχνή μαγειρική, Italikos playfully runs counter to the traditional frameworks of philosophy, in which its main concerns were control over the appetitive functions of our body.²⁷⁸ On the contrary, Italikos connects both of them, by casting himself in the role of another Athenaeus, whose work he not only quotes, but also names by its title in the letter.

On top of the witty re-appropriation of the ancient motif of the feasts of words, it is tempting to see a subversive literary play on the part of Italikos. As I have mentioned above, the letter was penned on the occasion of the imperial appointment to the post of the teacher of the medics.²⁷⁹ Considering the relatively low status of medicine, which still seem to have prevailed in the twelfth century, Michael’s description of the splendid intellectual feast might have actually had a humorous overtone and could be compared, at least to some degree, to the *Ptochoprodromika*.²⁸⁰ He is careful enough to enlist only the most extravagant, costly and exquisite edible in the catalogues of dishes which he includes in his letter. It is for this reason that he mentions, for instance the flat-cake à la Gelonios (who was the tyrant of Sicilian city of Acragas and was famous for his extravagantly rich style of living),²⁸¹ while the ‘food’ which they are going to ‘eat’ will be washed down not even with the exquisite kind of wine which was purportedly drunk by the Persian king Chalybonios, but with the divine nectar, reserved only for the gods.

Hence, what Michael might be hinting at throughout the entire letter that both he and his addressee, could never afford the extravagant edibles catalogued in the letter. From this vantage point, the only thing that seems to be left for them as poorly paid educated literati, is only to speak about lavish feasts and dainty tidbits. Such an interpretation becomes plausible if we consider the fact that the above-mentioned *Ptochoprodromika* were composed in the intellectual milieu of Italikos, thus it is safe to assume that the jokes about the hungry literati who could only afford to speak about costly food while they fared on a diet of the lower

κρούμασι καὶ συνέχω ῥυθμοῖς ... ἔστι δ’ οὗ καὶ ἡ τέχνη τῶν λόγων περισσάλπει τὰς μήνιγγας μετὰ τῶν ἐκείνης θαυμάτων τῆς Ἰσοκράτους Σειρήνος, τῆς Δημοσθένους ἡχοῦς, τῆς Ἡροδότου γλυκύτητος, τῆς τοῦ Θουκυδίδου σεμνότητος, καὶ ὅσοι τῶν ἐκείνης μελῶν ἀποπνέουσιν ... Τοιαύτη μὲν ἡ καθ’ ἡμᾶς εὐωχία· τοιοῦτον δὲ τὸ ἐστιατόριον.

²⁷⁷ For the discussion of Sybaris and its luxuries see the chapter no 3 in reference to Choniates’ criticism of the Angeloi dynasty.

²⁷⁸ For this see n. 309 in this chapter.

²⁷⁹ At least, as was postulated by the French editor of the text.

²⁸⁰ For the begging *topoi* in the *Ptochoprodromika* see M. ALEXIOU, “The Poverty of Écriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems,” *BMGS* 1986, 1-40.

²⁸¹ For the proverbial profligacy of the inhabitants Sicilian city of Acragas see also chapter 3, p. 96.

classes were well known to him. Moreover, both Kolovou and Roilos argued that the vast majority of culinary themes and motifs explored by the authors of the twelfth century originated from the ancient comic tradition and, more often than not, they introduce parodic elements into the literary discourse within which they appear.²⁸² Certainly, in his search for the culinary terms, Italikos might have reached not only to Athenaeus, but also to ancient comic tradition. Therefore, read against such background, the letter might have been an extended joke, or a parodic comment on the ‘hardships’ of life of the twelfth-century Byzantine literati.

The motif of the culinary cuisine was further re-used by at least several authors in the twelfth century and at times, it appears in the most unexpected places. For instance, in the *Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles*, Nicholas Mesarites shows how the students who attend to the school which was adjacent to the church, spend their time on ‘chopping up’ (συγκοπὰς) the words into little pieces, ‘squeezing out’ (ἀποθλίψεις) the juice from them and ‘fileting’ them out (ἀποσμιλεύοντας).²⁸³ As we can see, all three terms used by Mesarites are related rather to the preparation of dishes than to the parsing of words. Thus, the verb συγκόπτω normally denotes the action of cutting into very small pieces, ἀποθλίβω, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, was regularly used to signify squeezing out the juice from the grapevines, while the verb ἀποσμιλεύω normally denotes the action of carving something (a piece of food, or a piece of stone) with a sharp knife.²⁸⁴ Thus, Mesarites seems to equate the art of cooking with the art of preparing and using the words: the pupils whose learning activities he describes with the terms taken from the sphere of cookery, seem to be taught how to prepare and serve tasty dishes made out of nicely chopped words.

Finally, before we turn to the proper subject of the analysis in this chapter, let us focus on yet another author, namely Eustathios of Thessalonike. As a prominent scholar and teacher, who held several important imperial posts related to teaching activities, Eustathios possessed an immense knowledge of Greek literary tradition. His *opera magna*, the voluminous commentaries on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are excellent witnesses to this statement. Yet it is important to remember, that on top the Homeric *parekbolai*, Eustathios was working on the series of *scholia* to Aristophanic comedies, which are now extant only in small excerpts, which were incorporated into the body of the so-called *scholia recentiora*. What is even more interesting, Eustathios must have been thoroughly interested in the ancient Greek culinary tradition and took on himself the task of producing an epitome of Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists*. As Ilias Anagnostakis remarked, Eustathios read Athenaeus’ work

²⁸² F. KOLOVOU. *Die Briefe* 67: “Die enge thematische Verbindung zwischen den oben genannten, höchstwahrscheinlich auch in Byzanz fragmentarisch erhaltenen, Werken und der attischen Komödie mit ihrer Vorliebe für gastronomische Themen und Komödien-Typen aus dem Alltag, für parodistische lustige Gestalten von Köchen, Parasiten und Bauern, führt zur Hypothese, daß Eustathios höchstwahrscheinlich bei seiner scholiastischen Beschäftigung mit der attischen Komödie auf seine Quelle gestoßen ist ... Innerhalb dieses literarischen und scholiastischen Zusammenhangs kann die rege Beschäftigung des Eustathios und seiner Zeitgenossen, u.a. des Michael Italikos, des Theodoras Prodromos und des Ioarines Tzetzes mit der Opsopoiia, mit kulinarischen und parodistischen Themen, die größtenteils der Komödie entspringen, erklärt werden.” Also see ROILOS, *Amphoteroglossia* 225–301.

²⁸³ Mesarites, *Description of the Church* VIII.4: ὅψει δ’ ἂν καὶ ἐτέρους συλλαβαῖς τε προσκαθημένους καὶ διὰ βίουπαντὸς συγκοπὰς ὀνομάτων ἐμμελετῶντας καὶ ἀποθλίψεις καὶ ῥήματα ἅττα ἀποσμιλεύοντας, οἳ καὶ μειράκια τυμπανίζουσι καπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ ὡς ὑψηλοῦς τινας ἐξαίρουσιν ἑαυτοὺς φρονηματισμοῦ ἐμπιπλάμενοι.

²⁸⁴ As *Suda* α 3535 glosses: „*aposomeuouosi*: [meaning] carving with a knife, clearing out. Also, *aposomeumata*, ‘chips,’ denoting shavings which drop away in the act of carving something with a knife.” Also see the scholia to Aristophanes, *Frogs* 819 which *Suda* quotes here.

so many times during his scholarly endeavor, that he must have known considerable parts of it almost by heart.²⁸⁵

Just as was the case with Italikos' letter, Eustathios presented himself as a Byzantine alter-ego of the famous sophist from Naukratis.²⁸⁶ His lively interest in the achievements of the '*nouvelle cuisine*,' which was the latest craze among the wealthier classes of twelfth-century Byzantium can be gleaned from letters which he sent out to his friends. Many pieces from the epistolary corpus of Eustathios contain lively and sensual descriptions (ἐκφράσεις) of the most extravagant dishes. Kolovou noticed that for Eustathios, and contrary to the literary tradition commenced by Plato,²⁸⁷ the art of ὀψοποιία and of λόγοι were one and the same. Thus, just as in Italikos' letters, the art of preparing meals becomes one with the art of composing the words into a tasty combination. Certainly, Eustathios' ultimate aim was to produce such a plastic and expressive verbal image of a gourmand dish that one could see it before one's eyes and almost feel its taste.²⁸⁸ For instance, in one of the letters, Eustathios leaves a detailed description of a gourmand dish which consisted of a deboned and stuffed piece of fowl.²⁸⁹ To be sure, the *ekphrasis* is so detailed and sensual that even today one gets hungry once reading through the letter. Kolovou showed at length that the corpus of Eustathian letters is bristled with a plethora of references and vivid descriptions of various foodstuffs, be it of different kinds of fruits (e.g. peaches, or grapevines), of meats (e.g. venison, or birds which were simmered in wine) or other gourmet dishes,²⁹⁰ all of which constituted a part of "witty rhetorical diet" ("geistreichen rhetorischen Kost") of the scholar and the circle of literati who surrounded him.²⁹¹

Apparently, the influence of Athenaeus on Eustathios' literary output is not limited merely to the corpus of his letters. The material from the *opus magnum* of the sophist from Naukratis stood not only as a source for Eustathios' scholiastic endeavor in the *Parekbolai on the Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but also as a kind of authorial model which helped Eustathios shape the vast material of his own work. As a result, there are many apparent similarities between the proem to the *Deipnosophists* and the introductory section of the *Parekbolai on the Iliad*.²⁹² In Eustathios' eyes, Homer can be envisioned both as a cook, who prepares dainty dishes of words for anyone who reads his works, and as a host-banqueter who caters 'multifarious banquets' (ποικίλην πανδαισίαν) or 'wondrous rhetorical feasts' (θαυμασίαν οἶαν δαιταλουργίαν ῥητορείας). Baukje van den Berg has noticed that both the proem, and the remaining parts of the *Parekbolai*, are full of culinary terms.²⁹³ Eustathios consciously fashions himself as a direct counterpart of Athenaeus, who provides his readers with a

²⁸⁵ I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, 'Byzantine Diet and Cuisine. In Between Ancient and Modern Gastronomy,' in *Flavours and Delights* 43–63 at: 62.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ For this see note 309 in this chapter.

²⁸⁸ Of course, this is due to the fact that Eustathios was an avid reader and commentator of Hermogenes, and was following his theory of ἐκφράσις as a description of an object conveyed in such a way that it became visible through the very words which are used to characterize it, for the discussion of this see KOLOVOU, *Die Briefe* 66.

²⁸⁹ Eustathios, *Letter* 5. For a short discussion of the letter see KAZDAN–EPSTEIN, *Change* 62; KOLOVOU, *Die Briefe* 65.

²⁹⁰ For other aspects of linking the art of cooking with literary production see P. AGAPITOS, "Literary Haute Cuisine and its Dangers: Eustathios of Thessalonike on Schedography and Everyday Language," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 69 (2015) 225–241.

²⁹¹ KOLOVOU, *Die Briefe* 63.

²⁹² The imagery and its function has been discussed by BAUKJE VAN DEN BERG, "Playwright, Satirist, Atticist."

²⁹³ Ibid.

banquet of words. It consists of innumerable tasty tidbits, which lie here to be consumed and tasted with pleasure:

Also now, however, it is not necessary for the one who has heard that we follow the example of the ancients also in these things (i.e. in allegorical interpretation) to lose interest, as if it is possible also for him to collect for himself such things from there. For firstly, exactly as there is gratitude for cooks (καθάπερ τοῖς μαγειρεύουσι χάρις) not because they prepare things that did not exist before, but because they have put together into one things that are toilsome to bring together, having gathered them together themselves, so too will there be some gratitude for us, because without toil the readers have at their disposal what they seek, gathered together from many sources.²⁹⁴

Therefore, by means of equating the art of cooking and τεχνὴ ῥητορικὴ, Eustathios exposes the value of his literary endeavor, which might look questionable, at least at the first sight. Certainly, the vast body of material in the *Parekbolai* might seem repetitive and dull, since it reuses the immense literary tradition of Homeric scholia. Yet, just like the skillful cooks, Eustathios saw to it not to bore his readers to death: instead preparing a never-ending feast which consists of one lavish meal, he offers various delicious word-snacks, which were gathered from numerous sources and were put together into one versatile banquet.

3.2. *The Timarion and the Dangerous Charms of Rhetoric, or the Pitfalls of the Mouth*

It is against this background of the discourse of ‘literary cuisine,’ that I would like to read some of the key aspects of the anonymous satirical dialogue, the *Timarion*. Due to its thematic complexity it has generated considerable interest since the late medieval times. In the last decades of the thirteenth century Byzantine scholar, Konstantine Akropolites famously castigated the anonymous author of the dialogue for an outward voicing of blasphemous thoughts and purportedly promoting neo-paganism.²⁹⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century, Tozer appreciated the author of the *Timarion* for graphic descriptions of the satirized figures as well as for its ‘epigrammatic’ style and perceived the dialogue as a pleasurable and harmful Lucianic satire on some of the aspects of the Komnenian society.²⁹⁶ For Baldwin, who translated the dialogue into English, *Timarion* cannot be perceived as subversive towards religion by any stretch of the imagination, and it merely provides enjoyment in its humorous stance towards the society within which it was produced. Margaret Alexiou published a number of studies in which she elucidated complex narrative structure of the dialogue, and showed how it satirized a number of literary discourses which prevailed in the Komnenian period: religion medicine, law and, most importantly, philosophy and rhetoric.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Eustathios, *Parekbolai on the Iliad* 3.34–39. English translation by B. VAN DEN BERG, The wise Homer and his erudite commentator: Eustathios’ imagery in the proem of the Parekbolai on the Iliad,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 41.1 (2017) 30–44 at 41.

²⁹⁵ M. TREU, “Ein Kritiker des Timarion,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 1 (1892) 361–365. Also: B. BALDWIN. *Timarion*. Detroit 1984, 24–27.

²⁹⁶ H. F. TOZER, “Byzantine Satire,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 2 (1881) 233–270.

²⁹⁷ M. ALEXIOU, “Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: A Stylistic Analysis of the *Timarion* (ch. 6–10),” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8 (1982), 29–45. EADEM. *After Antiquity. Greek Language, Myth, and Metaphor*. Ithaca–London 2002, 100–111. For the engagement of the *Timarion* with ancient literature also see I. MENELAOU, “Byzantine Satire: The Background in the *Timarion*,” *Hiperboreea Journal* 4.2 (2017) 53–66.

Ingela Nilsson, has recently shown how the lively revival in the interest in Lucianic satires contributed to the re-use of the *katabasis* motif in a couple of literary works composed in the twelfth-century.²⁹⁸ In another study, Nilsson showed how the author of the *Timarion* used the literary material of the Second Sophistic (including mainly Lucian's works) in order to voice concerns and satirize the twelfth-century Byzantine society under the rule of the Komnenian dynasty. The fictitious story-world of the 'kingdom' of the dead in the *Timarion* becomes a platform in which various subversive, critical and comical approaches towards the Byzantine culture and its élites are voiced. From this vantage point then, the dialogue can be understood as an extensive comic commentary on Timarion's own standing as an intellectual in twelfth-century Constantinople.²⁹⁹

Przemyslaw Marciniak noted that it is hard to define what the *Timarion* actually is. Consequently, it is best to perceive it as a multi-sided literary piece that opens the possibility for diverging interpretation.³⁰⁰ This is most certainly true and can be best supported by the (apparent) lack of the consensus on what was the overall target of satire/aim of the dialogue. The interpretative approaches put forward by Anthony Kaldellis and Dimitris Krallis encapsulate this point particularly well. Going against most of the studies on the text, Kaldellis and Krallis argued in separate interpretations that the *Timarion* cannot be merely understood as a 'harmless satire' on the Byzantine society of the first part of the twelfth century. Quite the contrary, it should be rather read as a veiled yet scathing attack on the Komnenian cultural arrangement.

In his two studies on the *Timarion*, Kaldellis argued that the dialogue is far from being a humorous and innocent commentary on the society under the Komnenoi. It juxtaposes the philosophically-minded, truth-seeking and destitute intellectuals (such as Timarion himself) with the rich, gluttonous and bombastic orators (such as Theodore of Smyrna), who were promoted in the Komnenian cultural arrangement.³⁰¹ In a more recent study Kaldellis labelled the *Timarion* as a 'Hellenic satire,' which was intended as a radical attack on tyrannical Orthodoxy promoted by the Komnenian clan, which suppressed all modes of expression, which aimed at truth. The 'pagan' elements of the dialogue, the setting of the ancient Greek afterworld, the court-tribunal, which judges over Timarion's case and that is composed either by the 'pagans' of the past, or by the heretics, in Kaldellis' eyes, subversively denigrate all the pillars of Christian society. In result, the *Timarion* can be understood as an expression of ancient Greek *paideia*, and there is no reason to doubt the viewpoint of Akropolites. Ultimately, the *Timarion* was designed to be the expression of 'Hellenic identity,' which was at odds with Christianity.³⁰²

²⁹⁸ I. NILSSON, "Hades meets Lazarus. The Literary Katabasis in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in G. Ekroth–I. Nilsson (eds.), *Roundtrip to Hades: Visits to the Underworld in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition* (Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean). Leiden 2018, 322–341.

²⁹⁹ I. NILSSON, "Poets and Teachers in the Underworld. From the Lucianic Katabasis to the *Timarion*," *Symbolae Osloenses* 2016, 1–25.

³⁰⁰ P. MARCINIAK–K. WARCABA. *Timarion, albo Timariona przypadki przez niego opowiedziane*. Katowice 2014, 18. Similarly, Kaldellis, 'The *Timarion*: towards a literary interpretation,' in: P. Odorico (ed.), *Le face cachée de la littérature byzantine: Le texte en tant que message immediate*. Paris, 2012, 275–288.

³⁰¹ KALDELLIS, 'The *Timarion*,' 281: "The *Timarion*, in other words, presents a satirical but nevertheless serious history of education in Byzantium. It is fully engaged in the intellectual debates that must have been raging in and around the school of Theodoros about the relative merits of philosophy and rhetoric, as we know they had been since Psellos. Kydion and Timarion are two invented characters that exemplify this subtle contemporary dynamic."

³⁰² KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium* 276–283. Though, Kaldellis' argument for the existence of pagan intellectuals in the twelfth century Byzantium is highly questionable.

Arguing along similar lines, Krallis showed that under the surface of a ‘light-hearted’ commentary on various aspects of Byzantine culture, the *Timarion* aims at exposing the impossibility of open philosophical enquiry and critique under the Komnenian regime. Krallis argued that the means and techniques used by the anonymous author of the *Timarion* can be easily compared to those used by the Russian literati, who lived under the Soviet regime and critiqued it by means of obliqueness, convoluted allusions or even through a “process of displacement.” This, according to Krallis can be gleaned from the literary presentation of the central character of the dialogue, Timarion’s teacher, Theodore of Smyrna, who is merely “a liar with a penchant for vile food and luxury,” and thus his literary portrayal is subversively hostile.³⁰³

Taking these approaches as a starting point of this chapter, I would like to focus on a previously ignored, yet important aspect of the *Timarion*, namely the conjunction of consumption of food, dietary habits and the production of words. To be sure, food is ubiquitous in the dialogue. Its main characters are portrayed either in the acts of consumption and glut themselves on some fatty fare, or are constantly speaking about the tasty edibles of the upper world which they miss more than anything in the world. Therefore, if we accept that the *Timarion* is not merely a light-hearted, no-hard-feelings satire on the Komnenian society, then how are we to conceive of this omnipresence of gluttony in the text?³⁰⁴ Is it merely within the standard and clichéd arsenal of Byzantine jokes, that serve to amuse with no deeper symbolic meaning beneath it?

I have argued in the previous chapter that Psellos took recourse to consumptive imagery characteristic of iambic discourse in order to laugh down his opponent in the poetic competition. Jacob’s consumptive habits stood as vivid emblems of the complete lack of any literary skill as well as his unsocial/threatening character. I would like to contend that food and consumption-related imagery plays quite similar, but slightly divergent role within the *Timarion*. I agree with both Krallis and Kaldellis that the dialogue is in its essence a concealed attack on the excesses of Komnenian culture, where the pursuit of true λόγοι, of truth, is succumbed to a culture which despises the intellectuals who are mostly interested in the over-abundant production of grandiloquent, empty speech. Such a bombastic speech production, as it seems from the text pompous oratory, was the only means to secure wealth and power for oneself in the circle of twelfth-century Byzantine literati.

Although the *Timarion* was traditionally categorized as a pseudo-lucianic dialogue, it has been pointed out that this label is incorrect, since the text was not intended to be an imitation of any of Lucianic works. While there exist apparent similarities between the *Timarion* and the satires of Lucian, the anonymous Byzantine work is decisively something more than being ‘merely’ Lucianic.³⁰⁵ It draws from and engages in the dialogic relationship with numerous ancient and medieval literary traditions: medical literature, judicial oratory, travelers’ accounts, *ekphraseis*, the accounts of the descent to the underworld and many others. There is however one feature of the *Timarion* which has been insufficiently addressed,

³⁰³ Hence, he argues against the prevailing view, voiced (among others) by ALEXIOU, *After Antiquity* 104: “Timarion’s portrait of Theodore is funny but not hostile ... It functions merely to poke fun at the former teacher but also to comment obliquely on the question, controversial in the mid-twelfth century, of the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle.”

³⁰⁴ KALDELLIS, ‘The *Timarion*’ 280: “Gluttony for food and for speeches are related aspects of Byzantine society that Timarion satirizes. But there is another dynamic at work here that reveals what must have been a tension in Theodoros’ school or circle.” As I argue below, gluttony for food and for words are, in line with the aesthetics of iambic discourse, two facets of the same behavioral pattern.

³⁰⁵ MARCINIAK-WARCABA, *Timarion* 35.

namely the re-use and adaption of the ancient comic tradition. Of course, the motif of satirical *katabasis* readily reminds of Lucianic *Necyomantia*, but Ingela Nilsson has recently remarked that strong parallels can be found between the descent of Timarion and probably the most famous comic *katabasis* which was the main theme of Aristophanic *Frogs*. To be sure, it is seemingly hard to overlook the apparent parallels between the two texts. Just as the *Timarion*, *Frogs* serve as a commentary on the dire situation of the Athenian *polis* at the end of the fifth century BC. Moreover, the *Frogs* (just like the *Timarion*) obsessively focus on consumption and speaking.

For Heracles, whom the cowardly Dionysus needs in order to enter Hades, the only incentive to descent to the underworld is to have his stomach filled with food. The rescue-mission of Euripides in the comedy proves to be failure: ultimately, it is Aeschylus who is brought back to life, since Euripides was only able to offer clever and empty sophistries which offered no remedy to cure the situation in Athens.³⁰⁶ Such thematic and topical coincidences should come as no surprise: after all, the *Frogs* were included in the standard school triad of Aristophanic comedies which were read by the Byzantine pupils in the schools. From this vantage point, Michael Strain was been correct to conclude that both the form and the humour of the *Timarion* are at times strongly reminiscent of Aristophanic comedies.³⁰⁷ It would certainly be surprising if Byzantine literary text, whose main object is to satirize certain individuals and/or social phenomena, which is so obsessively focused on food and its consumption, did not make use of the ancient comic literature.

This dialogic relationship between the *Timarion* and Aristophanic tradition is particularly important to the present analysis. As I have pointed out, Nancy Worman the mouth plays an overtly important role in the discursive scheme of *iambos*, which is the main vehicle of the Athenian Old Comedy. We have seen in the previous chapter, how the mouth-centered iambic insult was re-used by Psellos and adapted to the formal and thematic frames of religious poetry. It is my contention that such iambic elements can be identified in the *Timarion*, and chiefly in its literary presentation of Theodore of Smyrna which, as I would like to argue, is far from being harmless and cannot be reduced to the innocent poking fun at the former teacher of the protagonist of the satire. As I shall argue, Theodore is characterized through the lenses and mechanisms characteristic of iambic discourse and, considered from this perspective, he is similar to the gluttonous babbling sophistic politicians known from Aristophanic comedies. As a matter of fact, just as is the case in the comedies of Aristophanes, mouth and its activities function as a pivot in the portrayal of Theodore of Smyrna. Similarly to the aggressive and manipulative babblers from the Aristophanic comedies, Theodore is characterized chiefly through his yapping maw, while his verbal habits map themselves on his consumptive needs: he is presented in the guise of a greedy glutton, whose raging appetite for unclean food was not curbed even by the humble fare served in Hades.

Ἀπληστία, the insatiable desire, or greediness, becomes both a thematic concern and literary strategy of the *Timarion*. Yet, why is that so? I have shown in the first section of the present chapter how the twelfth-century Byzantine authors linked the culinary art with the art of rhetoric. As Kolovou argued, Eustathios took special care to forge such a link. Going against Platonic outlook which downgraded rhetoric as a mere ability towards sophistic persuasion which is devoid of any craft/method (τέχνη). As a result, he consciously represented himself as a crafty (τεχνικός) cook who prepares splendid feasts of λόγοι for the

³⁰⁶ NILSSON, "Poets and Teachers" 8.

³⁰⁷ M. STRAIN, 'How does satire work in the *Timarion* and whom/what it is aimed at?' [Unpublished MA dissertation]. University of Birmingham 2013, 13.

willing audience. From this perspective, it might be safely assumed that the *Timarion* engages in the very same conflict between the seemingly irreconcilable spheres of rhetoric (as a dangerous skill of mere persuasion) and philosophy (as an activity aimed at attaining truth).

Hence the end-game of the *Timarion* is not only to satirize the excessive physical appetite for food of the intellectuals under the Komnenoi, but also their greediness for fancy and idle talk. All of which were brought about as a resultant of cultural arrangement set up by the Komnenian dynasty which openly suppressed any criticism and seems to have minimized philosophical endeavor.³⁰⁸

Seen through these interpretive lenses, ἀπληστία, which forms the thematic frame of the *Timarion*, can be understood as an inability to curb one's mouth, both in terms of eating (gluttony) and in terms of speaking (propensity towards grandiloquent yapping).³⁰⁹ From this vantage point, the author of the *Timarion* levels penetrating critique of the cultural arrangement under the Komnenoi by engaging in the long-standing conflict between rhetoric and philosophy, thus the power of sheer verbal persuasion and versus the power of truth. We have already seen that since the times of Socrates, the principal aim of any philosophical system, from Socrates/Plato, Aristotle to Philo Judaeus was to exert control over the 'consumptive' organs of the body, some of which happen to emit the words as well: the tongue as well as the belly.³¹⁰

The *Timarion* begins as a conversation between two 'friends,' the protagonist of the satire, Timarion, and Kydion who have not seen each other for a considerable amount of time and Kydion is anxious to hear why his interlocutor has been absent for such a long time. The interchange of words between Timarion and Kydion, at least on the surface level, does not seem to be dialogic at all.³¹¹ Timarion's interlocutor seems to be introduced in the text merely as a literary mechanism that facilitates the unfolding of Timarion's narrative about his journey to Thessalonike and the unexpected events which led Timarion to Hades. However, a closer look at the text might allow us to discern a deeper dynamic that occurs between the two characters.

It is through the literary person of Kydion that the above-mentioned ἀπληστία is introduced into the dialogue.³¹² From its very onset, Kydion pushes his interlocutor to tell everything in the most minute detail. He begins by quoting the *Iliad*, urging Timarion to "speak out; hide it not in thy mind; that we both may know,"³¹³ and as the conversation progresses, Kydion's insatiable greediness for words intensifies. He incites Timarion not to waste any of his time (μὴ πρόη τὸν καιρὸν), since he is hungry to learn (γλιχομένος μαθεῖν) and feels tortured (μὴ ἐπὶ μᾶλλον ἐκκαΐης) that Timarion is reluctant to share any extended narrative, but feeds him only with a number of quotations from Homer and Euripides, and pokes fun at his friend that the moment he hears the entire story he will be wishing he had never heard

³⁰⁸ As KRALLIS, "HARMLESS SATIRE" 240 remarks, the *Timarion* was a product of a social setting which did not take any criticism lightly. The dialogue was composed most probably as a direct or indirect aftermath of John Italos' trial.

³⁰⁹ Also see a very interesting discussion of a dangerous bookishness understood as an addiction (ἄπληστος ἔρως) in Nikephoros Basilakes' *Prologue* by A. PIZZONE, "Anonymity, Dispossession and Reappropriation in the Prolog of Nikēphoros Basilakēs," in *The Author in the Middle Byzantine Literature*, Eadem (ed.), Berlin–Boston 2014, 225–244 at 227–232.

³¹⁰ HULTIN, *The Ethics of the Obscene Speech* 18–81.

³¹¹ KRALLIS, "Harmless Satire" 226: "The *Timarion* then, is a dialogue, even if at first sight only in a superficial form."

³¹² For a slightly different discussion of this dialogic exchange see KALDELLIS, 'The *Timarion*' 279–281.

³¹³ *Timarion* 1.4–5: 'ἔξαύδα, μὴ κεῖθε νόω, ἵνα εἶδομεν ἄμφω.' Cf. *Il.* 16.19

it.³¹⁴ Yet, despite a number of Timarion's attempts to avoid narrating the entire story, Kydion insists to get on with it (ἄρξαι λοιπὸν τῆς ἱστορίας). Timarion reluctantly provides his friend with a general account of what has occurred during his travel, while he constantly repeats that he does not intend to dwell on too many details.³¹⁵ Of course, this is not enough for greedy Kydion: he laughs down Timarion's narrative skills as miserable (σχέτλιος), being all cursory and obscure (συνεπτυγμένως κάπιτροχάδην ἀεὶ διηγούμενος),³¹⁶ but not saying what Kydion actually wishes to hear. Finally, Timarion apparently angered by the greedy nagging of his friends, bursts out shouting: "O that insatiability of yours, my Kydion! You can never curb your appetites for the stories of others!"³¹⁷

What unfolds from here on, is a quite lengthy account of Timarion's trip to the city of Thessalonike and one cannot escape the feeling that Timarion does that reluctantly only to get rid of his friend who is over-eager to be served with torrents of words. It has been already noticed, that the account includes the elements which were taken from other genres, be it travel accounts, medical treatises, geographical excurses, elaborate *ekphraseis*, judicial oratory or encomia.³¹⁸ What has escaped the attention of the scholars so far, is that such a generic 'madness' stems directly from Kydion's rhetorical ἀπληστία.³¹⁹ He eagerly wants to be fed with words and Timarion is almost at his wit's end to cater to the insatiable needs of his interlocutor. Therefore, nagged continuously by Kydion, Timarion offers in the first place a short travel narrative peppered with a geographical excursus/ἐκφρασις. He begins by ironically dismissing his 'friend,' by asking to be pardoned if he does not dwell on every possible detail:

Timarion: ... All right, I'll tell you what happened, as it happened, but do forgive me if I don't include such choice details as the crow that flew down at me, or the stone that dashed against the horses' hooves, or the bramble bush by the roadside that entangled us.³²⁰

Yet, despite this promise, he includes a minutely detailed excursus on the river Axios, describing its full course, dwelling on the fertile grounds in the area of its estuary, where the farmers can easily cultivate the land with success and the plateau where the generals might train their armies and does not fail to mention Euripides' *Phaedra*.³²¹ Indeed, even the minute details such as stones and bushes, which he has just promised not to include, are mentioned in Timarion's excursus.³²² Apparently fed up with his incessant babbling, Timarion abruptly stops providing or providing only a general description of the fair of St. Demetrios in Thessalonike.³²³

This, of course, does not satisfy Kydion's ἀπληστία and once again he reprimands Timarion for returning to his 'natural disposition' (οἰκεῖον ἦθος) of being tacitly evasive. Once

³¹⁴ *Timarion* 1.22–24.

³¹⁵ *Timarion* 2.31–32: οὐ χρὴ περὶ τούτου λέγειν περαιτέρω ἢ σὲ περὶ τῶν ἐγνωσμένων μαθάνειν; 2.41 καὶ ἀπλῶς ... 2.44–45: ἅπαξ ὑποθέμενος ταύτας τῷ λόγῳ σατραπικὰς καὶ τυραννικὰς.

³¹⁶ *Timarion* 3.54–55.

³¹⁷ *Timarion*, 3.64–65: Ἀβάλε σοι τῆς ἀπληστίας, ὦ φίλε Κυδίῳν· ἀκόρεστος ἄρα εἶ διηγημάτων καὶ ἀκουσμάτων ἀλλοδαπῶν

³¹⁸ ALEXIOU, *After Antiquity* 101, MARCINIAK–WARCABA, *Timarion* 19–32.

³¹⁹ Except for KALDELLIS, 'The Timarion,' on whose discussion I am building my argument.

³²⁰ *Timarion* 3.66–69: οὐκοῦν λέγωμεν τῆς ἀκολουθίας ἐχόμενα, συγγνωμονήσαις δ' ἂν πάντως, εἰ κορώνην περιπτᾶσαν ἡμᾶς ἢ λίθον τοῖς τῶν ἵππων ποσὶ προσαραχθέντα, ναὶ μὴν καὶ βάτον παρόδιον ἐπιδραξαμένην, τῇ διηγῇσει μὴ παρενείρωμεν

³²¹ *Ibid.* 5.126–142.

³²² *Ibid.* 85–86: οὕτως ἀλιθὸς ἐστὶν ἡ χώρα καὶ ἄθαμνος καὶ ὁμαλὴ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα.

³²³ Find the article quoted by Ingela.

more, Timarion is made to elaborate in more and more details about the fair of St. Demetrios which he attended to during his sojourn to Thessalonike. In result, Kydion is served with a series of narratives (διηγήσεις), infused with elaborate descriptions of either the fair itself, the participants and the venue where it all took place, infused with a subversively resonating encomium of the governor of the city, all of which are interrupted by Kydion several times. He constantly reminds his ‘friend’ of the initial arrangement that they struck, while Timarion feels that he must honour it. I shall return to this in a moment.³²⁴

Feeling obliged, Timarion caters to the rhetorical taste of his interlocutor, juggling with genres and, at times, engaging in bombastic speechifying, as is the case in the hyperbolized encomium of the anonymous governor of Thessalonike.³²⁵ The entire series of the λόγοι-dishes are finally concluded by a specious case of medical ἐπίκρισις, in which Timarion describes in the medical jargon of the day the exact reason why he was unjustly snatched and taken to Hades.³²⁶ As Anthony Kaldellis noticed “...the *ekphrasis* and the *encomium* are not the ‘center of the discourse’ but rather irrelevant to the tale Timarion wanted to tell initially.”³²⁷ Hence, what Timarion caters to Kydion is not a literary satire of particular genres, but rather that of his interlocutor and his appetite.³²⁸ In other words, what Timarion seems to be doing is merely to mock idle speechifying which happens to be so close to Kydion’s heart. The mouth and its activities related both to eating and speech-production can be understood as the pivot of Timarion’s critique of Kydion and hence explores one of the most standard features of the traditional iambic imagery. To be sure, Timarion’s interlocutor seems to be sharing a few characteristics of the chatterbox-type person known from Theophrastus’ *Characters*, a work which drew heavily on the iambic tradition in its exploration of the intemperate mouths.³²⁹

The bottom line of this verbal exchange can be gleaned from the characterization of the interlocutors. Timarion tries to be tacit and is interested only in the facts of the matter, because his natural disposition (οἰκεῖον ἦθος), which is openly derided by Kydion, is philosophy. Unlike unbridled sophistry, it urges one to control one’s talk, not to overuse it. Certainly, from the very onset of the dialogue, Timarion is careful to present himself as a ‘traditional’ philosopher and reminds Kydion that divine fortune (θεία πρόνοια) favors only those who are predisposed towards philosophy (a.k.a. truth).³³⁰ In the very first version of the account of his journey, he comments that despite the fact that he and his companions were clad in rather ‘squalid’ (αὐχμηρός) and philosophical (i.e. humble) attire, they were greeted

³²⁴ *Timarion*, 5.108–113: Δέδοικα, φίλε Κυδίῳ, εἴ σοι πειθοίμην, ὥς καὶ διανυκτερεῦσαι συμπεσεῖται ἡμῖν κατὰ τὴν σὴν γνώμην διασκευάζουσι τὴν διήγησιν. Ἀλλὰ τί πάθω; τὰ τῶν φίλων τοιαῦτα, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἀπαραίτητα καὶ τυραννίδος ἐγγύς καὶ οὐκ ἐνὸν παραιτήσασθαι τὸ ἐπίταγμα, ὁποῖόν ποτ’ ἂν εἴη.

³²⁵ This passage has been discussed by Alexiou, ‘Literary Subversion’.

³²⁶ *Timarion* 11.290–330

³²⁷ KALDELLIS, ‘The *Timarion*’ 279.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* 280.

³²⁹ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 281: “*Characters* as a whole, is organized around the ways in which appetitive behaviors broadcast one’s character, and these often involve the mouth. Many of them also make use of the same vocabulary that shapes iambic discourse quite generally ... The mouth, moreover, dominates the sketches [in the *Characters*] that detail various kinds of volubility, rapacity, and rudeness; but this does not exhaust those that offer ways of using it as evidence of intemperance.” Theophrastian chatterbox is characterized through his insatiable propensity towards production and reception of idle speeches (ἡ δὲ ἀδολεσχία ἐστὶ μὲν διήγησις λόγων μακρῶν καὶ ἀπροβουλεύτων) Theophrastus, *Characters* III.

³³⁰ *Timarion* 2.33–35: θεία τις ἐπικουρήσασα πρόνοια τὴν τε ὁδὸν εὐμάρησε καὶ τὰ κατὰ μέρος εὖ διέθηκεν. For this see also KRALLIS, “Harmless Satire.”

everywhere as if they had been satraps.³³¹ Being so philosophically predisposed, Timarion even forgot to take care about the necessary provisions and did not take either food or drink with himself (βρώτα καὶ ποτὰ).³³² Notwithstanding this, with good fortune on his side, he participated in 'royal' feasts throughout his way, yet as a true philosophical type, he is not willing to share any details on the consumed food, as it would be the transgression of philosophical ἐγκρατεία.

Other hints at the philosophical ἦθος of Timarion are scattered throughout the text of the dialogue. Nagged by Kydion for the second time, Timarion scolds his interlocutor's ἀπληστία and somewhat unwillingly continues to build the ἐκφρασις of the fair in Thessalonike.

He begins his description by recounting how he and his co-travellers went down (κατήειμεν) to the city before the celebrations had started (πρὶν ἢ τὴν ἑορτὴν ἐπιστῆναι Δημῆτριον τοῦ μαρτύρου).³³³ The act of 'coming down' is mentioned once again a little further in the text. After a meticulous description of the booths, in which the attendants of the fair lived and sold their goods, Timarion mentions twice more times the very act of coming down to the city from the hill (κατιών) in order to participate in the festivities (ἑορτή).³³⁴ Does the very act of descending to the city is a mere state of fact, or is there a deeper meaning hidden behind it? Barry Baldwin has noticed that the author of the *Timarion* consciously alludes to the opening scene of Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates goes down in order to pay his honors to the goddess Bendis (Thracian version of Artemis):³³⁵

Socrates: I went down (κατέβην) yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon, son of Ariston. I wanted to say a prayer to the goddess and also to see (θεάσασθαι) what they would make of the festival (τὴν ἑορτήν), as this was the first time they were holding it.³³⁶

Surely, the supposition of Baldwin seems plausible: not only do the passage from Plato's dialogue and the *Timarion* share similar grammatical construction (κατέβην ... εἰς Πειραιᾶ versus κατήειμεν ... εἰς τὴν Θεσσαλονίκην), but also the very purpose of this 'coming down' was ultimately religious.³³⁷ It might be safe to assume then that leaving overt intertextual links to the words used by Socrates in the *Republic*, the anonymous author of the *Timarion* consciously modelled the protagonist of the dialogue as a Socratic type, thus a paragon of complete self-control over his body.

This is of utmost importance both to the understanding of both, the dynamics of the literary encounter between Kydion (and further, Theodore) and Timarion and to the meaning of the entire text. The dividing line between the two characters comes down exactly to the very control of their own bodies, and chiefly, to the mastery over their mouths. Kydion is

³³¹ Ibid. 2.35–37: ἵνα γὰρ συλλήβδην ἐρῶ, σατραπικαῖς δεξιώσεσι καὶ χορηγίαις ἡμᾶς ἐφωδίασε, φιλοσόφως καίτοι γε καὶ αὐχμηρῶς ἐσταλμένους.

³³² Baldwin, *Timarion* 83 n. 17 rightly notes that the lack of provisions on Timarion's side is a paragon of Timarion's 'otherworldly' philosophical disposition.

³³³ *Timarion* 3.69–71.

³³⁴ *Timarion* 6.147–148: Εἰ δὲ καὶ τὰ ἔνδον ζητεῖς, ὦ φιλοπράγμων ἐταῖρε ὡς ὕστερον κατιών ἐκ τῆς ἀκρωρείας ἐθεασάμην ... Ibid. 6.158–159: Εἰ δὲ καὶ τὰ ἔνδον ζητεῖς, ὦ φιλοπράγμων ἐταῖρε ὡς ὕστερον κατιών ἐκ τῆς ἀκρωρείας ἐθεασάμην ...

³³⁵ Baldwin, *Timarion*

³³⁶ Plato, *Republic* 327 a: Σωκράτης: κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ μετὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος προσευξόμενός τε τῇ θεῷ καὶ ἅμα τὴν ἑορτὴν βουλόμενος θεάσασθαι τίνα τρόπον ποιήσουσιν ἅτε νῦν πρῶτον ἄγοντες

³³⁷ Socrates goes down in order to pray to the goddess (προσευξόμενός τε τῇ θεῷ), while Timarion wished to visit the holy places and pay respects to the saint, *Timarion* 4.94–95: καὶ τοῖς θείοις τεμένεσι καὶ ἱεροῖς προσελθόντες καὶ τὴν ὀφειλομένην τιμὴν ἀπονείμαντες.

characterized mainly through the lenses of his insatiability, ἀπληστία, thus the vice which was traditionally linked to the gluttons.³³⁸ More than that, Kydion's ἀπληστία is directly mapped onto his verbal behavior, as he clearly shows the propensity to empty talk and abuse. All his 'inane,' to use Baldwin's term,³³⁹ interruptions serve a very particular function in the text. Not only does he hinder his interlocutor from telling what he originally wanted to say, but he is also aggressive, and abusive and by no means is it a mere poking fun. At first, he berates Timarion's storytelling skill as merciless or abominable (σχέτλιος),³⁴⁰ at another time, he mocks Timarion's narrative for lacking any substance at all. According to Kydion, his 'friends' stories seem to possess only an introduction and a conclusion, while there is nothing in between them.³⁴¹ It should not surprise us that Timarion, as the dialogue progresses, becomes more and more irritated with his interlocutor, who is constantly meddling with his story. This is why, angered at Kydion, Timarion finally shouts 'To hell with your insatiability, my friend!'³⁴²

What we can see here then is the inherent conflict between voracious insatiability of the yapping mouth and philosophical continence. Indeed, Timarion's ἐγκράτεια is hinted at frequently within the text. Recounting how smoothly went the initial phase of their travel, Timarion points out to his interlocutor that there must certainly exist some divine force that provides those who chose to engage themselves in philosophy (τοῖς αἰρουμένοις φιλοσοφεῖν) with troublesome life (ἢ τοῦ ζῆν εὐκολία).³⁴³ What is more, while Kydion is constantly troubled by his insatiability, which is presented as one and only motive behind his actions, Timarion is driven merely by his own curiosity. While Kydion tries to fill his insatiable appetite for loquaciousness, the protagonist of the story narrates how, just as Socrates in Plato's *Republic*, he descended to the city in order to satisfy himself with the sights/spectacles (θεαμάτων ἐμπλέως γέγονα), and how he proceeded further into the staged fair out of the desire to see other things (ἔρωτι θεαμάτων ἐτέρων).³⁴⁴ Along the very same lines, further in the text, he mentions how the very sight of the spectacles gave him no ordinary delight (γῆθος οὐ τὸ τυχόν ἔσχον ἐκ τούτου δὴ τοῦ θεάματος).³⁴⁵ Moreover, Timarion underlines that the primary reason for his sojourn from the hill to the city itself was his aversion towards wasting his time on idleness.³⁴⁶ Thus again, it might be safely assumed, that the protagonist of the satire, as opposed to Kydion, is driven mainly through the philosophical need for cognition. Instead of

³³⁸ For which see *Suda* α 3230: Aplēstia: [in other words] gluttony. And, as the proverb says: Insatiable *pithos*; in relation to those who eat a lot, which is drawn from the myth of the Danaids, as they drew and poured the water into the *pithos*. Those who are uninitiated suffer because of thios jat. [Ἀπληστία: ἢ ἀδηφαγία. καὶ παροιμία: Ἀπληστος πίθος, ὃ ἐν ἄδου, ὁ τετρημένος. ἐπὶ τῶν πολλὰ ἐσθιόντων: ἀπὸ τοῦ περὶ τὰς Δαναίδας μύθου, παρ' ὅσον ἀνιμῶσαι ἐκεῖναι ὕδωρ εἰς πίθον ἔβαλλον. πάσχουσι δὲ περὶ τοῦτον τὸν πίθον αἱ τῶν ἀμυήτων ψυχαί.]

³³⁹ Baldwin does not seem to perceive any significant function in Kydion's idle talk, other than being inane and apparently tiresome to the reader. See for instance BALDWIN, *Timarion* 83 n. 10: "Kydion constantly indulges in this kind of self-defeating interruption ..." and *ibid.* 83 n. 19: "As earlier observed, it is Kydion who is exasperating with his inane interruptions."

³⁴⁰ Indeed, *Suda* σ 1783 notes only negative meanings of this adjective: Σχέτλιος: ὀδυνηρός, χαλεπός, ἀγνώμων, ἀτυχής, δεινοπαθής, ἄδικος, ἄπορος, θλιβόμενος, τλήμων, ἐπαχθής.

³⁴¹ *Timarion*, 4.99–101: εἰώθει γὰρ ἐν τῷ διηγέσθαι μόνης ἀρχῆς καὶ τέλους μεμνησθαι, τὰ ἐν μέσῳ παρεῖς.

³⁴² *Timarion* 2.64: Ἀβάλε σοι τῆς ἀπληστίας, ὦ φίλε Κυδίῳν! As *LSJ* notes, it's cognate βάλλε means something approximate to 'away with you.'

³⁴³ *Ibid.* 2.46–47.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 6.165–167: Ἐπειδὴ ταῦτα οὕτω κατὰ σχολὴν ἐθεασάμην καὶ θεαμάτων ἐμπλέως γέγονα, πάλιν ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν ἡγόμην ἔρωτι θεαμάτων ἐτέρων καὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς δηλαδὴ συνάξεως

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 7.182–183.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 3.72–75.

wanting to fill his mouth with empty talk, Timarion wishes primarily to feed his intellectual curiosity.

Yet, why does he choose to engage in the senseless loquaciousness? Or, to put it differently, does he have any choice whatsoever not to cater to Kydion's ἀπληστία? Let us return to the already mentioned passage where Timarion admits grudgingly that he feels obliged to grant Kydion's requests for continuing the story:

My dear Kydion, I'm afraid we shall have to spend the whole night here if I tell you everything you want to know. But what can I do? Friends' requests of this sort are tantamount to royal commands. One can't get out of it, whatever it may be. So here it goes, right back to the beginning.³⁴⁷

It does seem that Timarion feels to be left with no choice to do whatever he either likes or think that might be right. But, why is that so? As a matter of fact, Baldwin's English translation does not reflect precisely the Greek words uttered by the main hero of the dialogue. He remarks that these specific kinds of requests (τὰ τῶν φίλων τοιαῦτα) are not only unavoidable, or even merciless (ἀπαραίτητα), but also they are ostensibly close to tyranny (τυραννίδος ἐγγύς). The wording is far from being positive or innocent: Timarion clearly finds himself with his back up against the wall, and is fully aware that he has to pay due justice to his friends' inexorable requests.

The specific kind of φιλία which connects Timarion and Kydion should not be understood as friendship as such and the protagonist of the satire alludes to the real nature of this relationship by comparing it to tyranny itself. The mutual link between the two characters rests upon the unequal status of one (Timarion) towards the other (Kydion). Przemysław Marciniak observed that the φιλία between them is of unequal status and rather signifies dependence of the first one upon the latter, either as a student towards the teacher or as a client towards the patron.³⁴⁸ Against the background of Kydion's ἀπληστία for words and the social context of the Komnenian era, the latter seems to be even more plausible. As we have seen, Timarion is reluctant to comply with Kydion's request and initially wishes to continue only with what he wants to narrate. In the end, however, he is obliged to the 'tyrannical' nature of their 'friendship' and has no choice whatsoever: as a dependent, he has to cater to the needs of his interlocutor ('patron'). Hence, before he tells the story that he intended to tell from the very beginning, he is made to fulfill the 'mouthy' needs of his friend-patron.

3.3. "The Loud-mouthed Consumers." *Gluttonous Prattle in Hades*

Once the festival of Demetria had finished, Timarion took to his way back from Thessalonike to Constantinople. The return, however, turned out not to be as favourable as the initial part of the travel. The moment Timarion came back to his lodgings, he was caught by a fever. As he recounts, no medicine, nor even strict diet was able to alleviate his sorry state and once the fever had gone away, he was attacked by severe inflammation that led up to the final vomiting of bile. When, after twenty without any food whatsoever Timarion fell asleep, his

³⁴⁷ Ibid. 4.108–113: Δέδοικα, φίλε Κυδίῳ, εἴ σοι πειθοίμην, ὥς καὶ διανυκτερεῦσαι συμπεσεῖται ἡμῖν κατὰ τὴν σὴν γνώμην διασκευάζουσι τὴν διήγησιν. Ἀλλὰ τί πάθω; τὰ τῶν φίλων τοιαῦτα, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἀπαραίτητα καὶ τυραννίδος ἐγγύς· καὶ οὐκ ἔνδον παραιτήσασθαι τὸ ἐπίταγμα, ὅποῖόν ποτ' ἂν εἴη. λέγωμεν οὖν ἀρξάμενοι.

³⁴⁸ MARCINIAK–WARCABA, *Timarion* 53 n.4.

spirit was snatched by the ‘conductors of the souls’ (ψυχαγωγοί) and led through the hell-mouth directly to the kingdom of the dead.³⁴⁹

Just like the upper world, Hades is brimming with insatiable characters. The moment Timarion crosses the iron entrance gates of Hades, he almost immediately chancers upon a lodging of a bearded old man (γηραλέος τις οὐ μάλα καθειμένος τὸν πώγνα), who reclines on his elbow, glutting himself on a lavish meal of pork and Phrygian cabbage which were completely immersed in a fatty mixture.³⁵⁰ Then, the old man:

... kept slowly inserting his right hand into the pot, not using just two or three fingers, but plucking the food out with his entire hand and guzzling it down greedily to the point of licking up what was running down his chin.³⁵¹

The imagery employed here by the author of the *Timarion* is clearly grounded in comic tradition and runs very similar to the humorous excerpts from Choniates’ *History*, which will be the subject of the next chapter. The old man in the *Timarion* is presented in the traditional guise of the lone eater (μονόφαγος), thus a standard character of the Old Athenian Comedy who eats alone in a traditionally ‘sympotic’ pose, and is not willing to give anyone any share of his meal. Moreover, the imagery of the scene is very much in line with the literary aesthetics characteristic of iambic discourse. The mouth and its uncontrolled passions stand at its very core: we witness how the old man stuffs himself to the full with his mouth wide open (χανδὸν ἐνεφορεῖτο), and greedily licks down the fat that flew through the big vessel that contained his meal (ὑπερρόφει τὰ διαρρέοντα). Surely, the fatness of this fancy meal (πιμελῆς τὰ πάντα μεστά) enhances the voraciousness of old man’s appetite.³⁵²

Yet, what or who is the main point of the insult here? Does the anonymous author of the *Timarion* simply satirize the propensity of the twelfth-century Byzantines towards gluttony or even a specific dish, Phrygian-styled cabbage, that seemed to have been fashionable in the first half of the twelfth century?³⁵³ Perhaps the very appearance of the anonymous man might serve as a hint that a deeper literary play is present in the passage. It is not without a reason that the old glutton is presented as possessing a beard, which from the times of ancient Greek tradition was deemed to be an attribute of philosophers. The short excerpt from the *Timarion* might be easily compared to the invective by Theodore Prodromos, entitled *Against the Old Man with a Long Beard* which ridiculed the rise of unschooled teachers in the twelfth-century Byzantium.³⁵⁴ In Prodromos’ piece, the old man who is the central target of the abuse, merely pretends to be a philosopher and does so by parading with a long unkempt beard.

³⁴⁹ *Timarion*, 13–15. KRALLIS, ‘Harmless satire’ 239 has proposed an interesting and plausible interpretation of the real cause of Timarion’s sickness. The fever and the convulsions which were experienced by Timarion and which led to the vomiting of his ‘elemental bile’ (thus one of the four humours in Galenic medical theory), were directly connected to what he saw during the festival of Saint Demetrios. Upon seeing the unmentioned governor from the Komnenian clan who paraded himself together with his ‘splendid’ retinue during the festival, the protagonist got so ‘inflamed’ with utter aversion towards Komnenian social and cultural arrangement that he could not help vomiting the entire χολή (bile), a humour that was traditionally linked to the sensation of anger.

³⁵⁰ *Timarion* 17.438–440: παρέκειτο δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ χύτρα χαλκῇ εὐμεγέθους κρεῶν ὑείων ταρίχων πλήρης καὶ κράμβης Φρυγίας, πιμελῆς τὰ πάντα μεστά.

³⁵¹ Ibid. 17.440–443: ἐνέβαλε δὲ ὁ γέρων κατὰ σχολὴν τῇ χύτρᾳ τὴν δεξιὰν πλὴν οὐ κατὰ δύο ἢ τρεῖς τῶν δακτύλων· ἀλλ’ ὅλη παλάμη ἀνειληφώς, χανδὸν ἐνεφορεῖτο καὶ ὥσπερ ὑπερρόφει τὰ διαρρέοντα.

³⁵² BALDWIN, *Timarion* 106 n. 188; ANAGNOSTAKIS, ‘*Timarion*’ 109–112.

³⁵³ For the Phrygian cabbage see *Prochoprodromika* 2.42: ... φρύγιον κράμβην καὶ γουλὶν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ κουνουπίδι; see also the discussion in EIDENEIER, *Ptochoprodromos* 224–225. The Phrygian cabbage might also be a pun on the place of the otherwise unknown man.

³⁵⁴ J. KUCHARSKI–P. MARCINIAK. “The beard and its philosopher: Theodore Prodromos on the philosopher’s beard in Byzantium,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 41 (1.2017) 45–54.

Seen against such a perspective, the gluttony of the old bearded man in the *Timarion* gains additional allusive meanings. Rather than being merely a gluttonous lone eater (μονόφαγος) who has his fill of pork and cabbage drenched in fatty sauce, he seems to be representing yet another misleadingly philosophical type whose bearded face is the only paragon of his purported philosophical stance. This apparent falsehood of his character is revealed further in the text, when Timarion learns how two fat mice are waiting for the man to fall asleep: the moment they hear him snore, they rush to lick the remnants of fatty broth from his beard.³⁵⁵ Considering the negative image of mice in Byzantine literature, it is hard to miss the insultingly mocking overtone of the portrayal. As we learn from Timarion's anonymous interlocutor, the gluttonous mice greedily peep at the old man as he stuffs himself with his fatty broth, leaving its remnants all over his beard and chins:

Don't you see how glad they [i.e. the mice] are to see this old man eating? Just look how happy they are, rattling their jaws and licking their lips, anticipating more of a fill of the fat than the old man.³⁵⁶

The behavior of the gluttonous mice seems to mirror that of the old bearded glutton, and it is interesting to observe how the text focuses on the actions of the jaws of these animals.

It might be safely assumed then that what links the old man and Kydion is their mouth-driven unphilosophical ἀπληστία. Again, the clash of the two types of characters (a rhetorical glutton versus a philosophically-oriented continent type) is reduced to how they comport themselves in terms of their mouths. Once Timarion passes by the old man's lodging, he is invited to share in the fate meal that the glutton stuffs himself with, the protagonist of the satire readily declines this proposition. He explains that he does not want to (οὐκ ἤθελον) taste the fatty broth, since he is not in his right mind after he had been snatched from the worldly life (τῇ τοῦ βίου μεταβολῇ τὸ φρονεῖν ἀφηρημένος).³⁵⁷ More importantly, however, he refuses the meal because he is afraid that he would be served with knuckles (κονδύλους) by the guides of the underworld. He is not at all interested in feasting on fatty food and clearly rejects to have his share of the meal. The knuckles are mentioned here with a very clear intent: the scholia to Aristophanes' *Peace* mentioned a proverb, which reads "when a child wants wine, give them a knuckle." A knuckle, as the scholiast comments, is supposed to work as a reminder not to wish for superfluous things.³⁵⁸ Mindful of this, Timarion is careful enough not to indulge himself in unnecessary pleasures of food.³⁵⁹

Further into his travel through the underworld, Timarion encounters yet another anonymous insatiable individual, and the meeting once more reflects the real character of the protagonist of the satire. At one moment, he bumps into another old man, whose figure looks skeleton-like (τὴν ὄψιν κατεσκληρότι) because during his life he was so wasted away by the

³⁵⁵ *Timarion* 19.563–618.

³⁵⁶ *Timarion* 18.495–498: ἢ οὐχ ὀρᾷς αὐτούς, ὅπως ἐντρανοῦντες ἐσθίοντι τῷ παλαιῷ τούτῳ χαίρουσιν; ὥσπερ καὶ ἀγαλλιῶνται καὶ τὰς σιαγόνας κροταλίζουσι καὶ τῷ χεῖλε τῇ γλώττῃ διαλείχονται, ὥσπερ αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ὁ γέρων τῆς πιμελῆς ἐμπορούμενοι;

³⁵⁷ It is hard to say what Timarion might have in mind here: BALDWIN, *Timarion* 106 n. 119 notes that the lack of want on Timarion's side was a result of the loss of taste as a result of his death. Τὸ φρονεῖν might also refer to Timarion's rational reasoning capabilities

³⁵⁸ *Scholia to Peace* 123a: ἐπαίξε παρὰ τὸ λεγόμενον εἰ δὲ οἶνον αἰτεῖ, κόνδυλον αὐτῷ δός ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐθίζειν τοὺς παῖδας μηδὲν τι περιττὸν ζητεῖν. Such a proverbial meaning is also preserved in *Suda* κ 2030. A similar, yet slightly divergent interpretation is preserved in Michael Apostolius' *Centuria* 3.2: "Ἄν οἶνον αἰτῇ, κόνδυλον αὐτῷ δίδου: ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν μὲν αἰτοῦντων, κακὰ δὲ ἀντιλαμβάνοντων· ἢ δὲ ἱστορία ἀπὸ τοῦ Κύκλωπος.

³⁵⁹ Therefore, if we accept KALDELLIS', "The *Timarion*" 280 proposition that the *Timarion* essentially exposes the internal tensions that existed in the circle/school of Theodore's of Smyrna, then the old bearded glutton seems to be the representative of the group opposed to that of Timarion, characterized by their senseless ἀπληστία.

constant fevers that he died. Upon seeing Timarion, the man greets him and does not seem to be interested in who Timarion actually is, what interests him, up to the point of obsession, is merely the price and quantity of his favourite foodstuffs:

Welcome, freshman corpse, tell me what's going on up there. How many mackerel can you get for an obol? What's the price of tunny, especially young tunny, and little sprats? What's the price of oil, wine, corn, all that stuff? Wait a minute, I missed out the most important thing of all. Was there a good catch of sardines? They were my favourite food up on earth, even more than pike.³⁶⁰

The skeleton-like appearance of the man might actually be a pun on his incontinent character, and it might be a probable pun on the sickly constitution of a typical glutton. To be sure, the current appearance of the man does not reflect his prodigious appetite, which was not eradicated even by his own death. The torrent of words with which he flushes Timarion is reminiscent of the hungry talk of the characters known from Aristophanic comedies, and it is highly probable that the anonymous author consciously imitated this literary mechanism of the Old Comedy. Not only does the passage include the characteristically comic catalogue of the edibles,³⁶¹ but also it mentions several foodstuffs which the writers of the ancient Greek comedy were particularly obsessed with, especially the fish which in Classical Athens were regarded as a special delicacy. For this reason, ὀψοφαγία was linked to fish-eating.³⁶² All of these work to underscore the gluttony of the skeleton-like man.

Once more, Timarion's reaction to the hungry gluttonous talk sets him as an opposite to the anonymous gourmand. He reveals his ἐγκράτεια again: by no means does he engage in the discussion about the edibles but is as precise as it is possible. Once the skeleton-like man finishes his hungry series of questions, Timarion assumes Socratic stance and responds to them 'in accordance with the truth itself.' The words which the protagonist of the satire uses here (τὴν οὕσαν ἀλήθειαν) are a direct quotation from Plato's *Philebus*, where, just as in the previous instance, they are used by Socrates.³⁶³ Having shortly answered the queries of the glutton, Timarion continues to reveal his philosophical attitude. He is keen to learn (ἐζήτησα μαθεῖν) what man is lying in the nearby tent and wishes know the cause (αἰτία) of his groaning.³⁶⁴ Such a careful choosing of words opposes the inquisitive/truth-seeking character with that of gluttonous babblers, whose only point of interest is to hear about the tasty food which he misses so badly in Hades. And it is only once the glutton learns 'the entire truth' about the current prices and stocks of food in the upper world, that he can reply to Timarion's enquiry about who the person who lies and groans in the nearby tent is.³⁶⁵

Let us move now to the central encounter of the satire which occurs in Hades.³⁶⁶ Having heard the story about the dead emperor Romanos IV Diogenes, who occupies the

³⁶⁰ Timarion, 22.537–542.

³⁶¹ See for instance the comic catalogue-exchange between Cario and Chremylus in *Peace* 189–193: "Chremylus: And many others besides; wherefore men are never tired of your gifts. They get weary of all else, — of love ... / Cario: Bread. / Chremylus: Music. / Cario: Sweetmeats. / Chremylus: Honors. / Cario: Cakes. / Chremylus: Battles. / Cario: Figs. / Chremylus: Ambition. / Cario: Gruel. / Chremylus: Military advancement. / Cario: Lentil soup." Also see the catalogue in *Ecclesiazusae* 834–847 which I discuss in the following chapter. At the same time, the words of the anonymous glutton are reminiscent of a number of excerpts from the *Ptochoprodika* which were clearly inspired by the literary tradition of the Old Comedy.

³⁶² DAVIDSON, *Courtesans* 26–35.

³⁶³ Plato, *Philebus* 48e.

³⁶⁴ *Timarion* 21.544–546.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 22.

³⁶⁶ On the importance of this encounter see for instance: KRALLIS, "Harmless Satire" 227–229; Nilsson *Poets and Teachers* 188–190.

above-mentioned tent, Timarion proceeds a bit further, only to be accosted by his former teacher, Theodore of Smyrna. Theodore himself was an important intellectual figure of the breakthrough of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, who succeeded the famous Michael Italos on the chair of ὑπάτος τῶν φιλοσόφων. This was imperial post which, as Ingela Nilsson pointed out, which had more to do with rhetoric, than with philosophy itself.³⁶⁷ The other data regarding his life and career are rather of cursory nature: prior to the acquisition of the prestigious position of ὑπάτος τῶν φιλοσόφων (the ‘consul of the philosophers’), Theodore held a number of judicial and senatorial positions, while in the first two decades of the twelfth century he proceeded to further posts in the imperial administration, namely that of κοιάστωρ and πρωτοκουροπαλάτης.³⁶⁸ Therefore, as we can see from this short overview, Theodore managed to build for himself an extremely successful career within the imperial regime held by Komnenian dynasty, a fact which is of utmost importance to his literary portrayal in the *Timarion*. Without any doubt, Dimitris Krallis was been correct to notice that Theodore’s comportment within the realities of the underworld offers the readers with important hints at his real character, namely the one of a “liar with a penchant for vile food and luxury.”³⁶⁹

While this is certainly true, what has escaped Krallis’ and Kaldellis’ attention, is how the verbal patterns associated to Theodore as well as his comportment towards his body and consumption reinforce the insulting tone of his presentation in the satire. It might be safely assumed then that the anonymous author of the *Timarion* followed iambic patterns of defamation while constructing the literary portrayal of the sophist from Smyrna. Just like Kydion and other babbling gluttons presented in the satire, he is characterized chiefly through the incontinency of his own mouth, both in terms of speaking and eating.

The pivotal role of the mouth in the literary portrayal of Theodore can be seen from the very beginning of his encounter with Timarion. As he recounts:

... we had only got a short distance before we were accosted by a tall, white-haired man, shriveled in body, but otherwise in fine condition. He was certainly full chatter, for he puffed out his cheeks as he spoke and roared with noisy laughter, and called out a welcome to my guides, adding, “So, who’s this new corpse you’re taking along?”³⁷⁰

The physical appearance of Theodore is reminiscent of the skeleton-like glutton whom Timarion met in Hades prior to his encounter with his former teacher. Both men look very much like skeletons (κατέσκληκώς) and seem old (λευκός τὴν τρίχα), but unlike the anonymous old glutton, Theodore appears to be in a very good shape (χαριεῖς). Timarion readily proceeds from the description of Theodore’s body to the verbal patterns which characterize his behaviour. We learn at once that he is full of chatter (στωμυλίας μεστός), that he puffs up his cheeks while talking (τὸ σῶμα διογκῶν) and laughs aloud (ἀνακαγχάζων). The portrait is reminiscent of the iambic loud-mouthed sophistic babblers, like the Paphlagon from Aristophanic *Knights*, the obnoxious and quibbling sophists who appear in the speeches and dramas composed in late five-century Athens or the aggressive and noisy yappers from Theophrastus’ *Characters*.³⁷¹

³⁶⁷ Before Italos, the chair was held by his teacher, Michael Psellos; NILSSON, “Poets and Teachers” 189.

³⁶⁸ For more details on Theodore’s career see A. KAZDAN, “Theodore of Smyrna,” in *ODB*, 2044, and E. TRIZIO, “Ancient Physics in the Mid-Byzantine Period. The Epitome of Theodore of Smyrna Consul of the Philosophers Under Alexios I Komnenos,” *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 54 (2012), 77–99.

³⁶⁹ KRALLIS, ‘Harmless Satire’ 227.

³⁷⁰ English translation by Baldwin modified by me; *Timarion* 23.573–577.

³⁷¹ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 11–24 (otherwise *passim*). Ibid 24: “Most of these iambic portraits, however, reference oral activities as a central means of mocking putatively brutal demagogues or craven sophists and

A closer inspection of the Greek terms used in the passage allows to identify the overtly insulting stance of Timarion towards his teacher. Thus, first and foremost, the adjective *χαριείς*, incorrectly translated by Baldwin as ‘elegant,’ seems to be linked rather to the overall physical shape of Theodore and it neatly counterparts his skeleton-like demeanor. *Στωμυλία*, which is emitted by the sophist’s *σῶμα* does not merely refer to his wordiness. As a matter of fact, in the comic/iambic tradition *στωμυλία* was one of the standard features of the sophistic babblers who over-produce meaningless words. Such an insulting ‘iambic’ meaning of the adjective *σῶμυλος* is very well attested in the *Suda*:

Stōmulos: Babbling, deviously clever, speaking persuasively, tricky, ready to fight with words, a fraud, a flatterer, a tattler ... Aristophanes writes: “These are small grapes left for gleaners [i.e. useless ones] and chatterboxes.”³⁷² In other words, about the ones who babble and speak persuasively ... Also attested in the form *στωμυλλόμεθα*, meaning ‘we exchange fooleries’ (*φλυαροῦμεν*), and [thus] *στωμύλλεσθαι*, instead of ‘to exchange fooleries’ (*φλυαρεῖν*). [Also attested in the following quotation]: “send off the guys to their wet-nurses, and let’s allow them to chatter (*στωμύλλεσθαι*) and prattle (*λαλεῖν*) about the warps and the woof and about their wax-dolls.” And Aristophanes [writes] elsewhere: Rid us of those suspicions, oh so savvy, / that make claptrap of our parleys (*αἷς στωμυλλόμεθ'*) ... and imbue / our thinking with a more obliging fellowship.”³⁷³ Also [attested in the form] *στωμυλώτατος*, [meaning] ‘the worst babbler’.³⁷⁴

Even the cursory glance at the above entry, as well as other co-related entries on the cognates of *στωμυλία* in the *lexikon* give clear indication of its mainly negative connotations. They are always connected to empty/idle talk, effeminate prattle, or gibberish and foolish speech.³⁷⁵ Such a negative meaning is moreover captured by the last quotation which is, most probably, taken from Agathias’ *Histories*. There, the superlative form of the adjective *σῶμυλος* is used by the philosopher Ouranios as a derogatory remark on the proceedings of the Persian court.³⁷⁶ In the light of the above, it is hard to imagine that the author of the *Timarion* tried to convey any positive overtone of this term in his presentation of Theodore.

Thus, *στωμυλία* has traditionally been linked with the sophistic types, who are prone to deceive, manipulate and lie in order to achieve their petty/fraudulent aims. On top of that, as the entry attests, *στωμυλία* is inextricably related both to the language and the aesthetics of iambic insult. It appears more than frequently in the literary texts from within the Old Comic tradition and those literary works which, as Nancy Worman argued, re-appropriated this

opposing them to an idealized notion of the Athenian citizen.” For the loud-mouthed Cleon/Paphlagon see *ibid.* 83–94.

³⁷² Aristophanes, *Frogs* 91.

³⁷³ Aristophanes, *Peace* 993–998. English translation by J. HENDERSON, *Aristophanes. Clouds, Wasps, Peace*. Cambridge MA, 1998 [LCL 488].

³⁷⁴ *Suda* σ 1154: Στωμύλος: λάλος, πολύκομπος, πιθανολόγος, εὐτράπελος, ἔφεδρος τῶν λόγων, ἀπατεών, κόλαξ. φλύαρος. Ἀριστοφάνης: ἐπιφυλλίδες ταῦτ' ἐστὶ καὶ στωμύλματα. ἀντὶ τοῦ λάλοι καὶ πιθανολόγοι. καὶ Στωμυλλόμεθα, ἀντὶ τοῦ φλυαροῦμεν. καὶ Στω- μύλλεσθαι, ἀντὶ τοῦ φλυαρεῖν. τὰ μεῖράκια ταῖς τίτθαις ἀποπέμψατε, καὶ θρυπτόμενα παρὰ ταύταις στωμύλλεσθαι καὶ λαλεῖν περὶ κρόκης καὶ στημόνων καὶ πλαγγόνων ἐάσωμεν. καὶ αὖθις Ἀριστοφάνης: παῦσον ἡμῶν τὰς ὑπονοίας τὰς περικόμψους, αἷς στωμυλλόμεθ' εἰς ἀλλήλους. καὶ συγγνώμη τινὶ πραοτέρῳ κέρασον τὸν νοῦν. καὶ στωμυλώτατος, φλυαρώτατος.

³⁷⁵ The co-related entries of *Suda* convey similar meanings σ 1152

³⁷⁶ Agathias, *Histories* 2.30.

aesthetics for their own use.³⁷⁷ Such an intimate link between στωμυλία and the language of *iambos* is strengthened in the entry by associating it with two other important terms, λαλία and φλυαρία. As Worman showed, both, alongside of στωμυλία, are essential to the mouth- and body-centered language of iambic discourse. Λαλία (literally chatter) is, within the discursive scheme of *iambos*, often associated with the effeminate prattle,³⁷⁸ and it is always used as an emblem of weak, unmanly and foolish types. In Theophrastus' *Characters*, the λάλοι are presented as fools who walk around the schools and the wrestling arenas, imposing their incontinent verbal habits upon the others, not allowing them to engage in more 'masculine activities'.³⁷⁹ In a similar vein, φλυαρία (foolish talk, drivel, twaddle), is yet another standard term of iambic abuse, characteristic of the sophistic types who stuff their listeners with verbal rubbish, only to get their attention.³⁸⁰

Yet, how do these 'iambic' ideas translate themselves on the literary presentation of Theodore? As we have seen, from the very onset of the encounter, he is presented through his incontinent verbal habits. He roars with his voice, he is full of idle prattle and his mouth is puffed up even in his skeleton-like body, which certainly is a pun on the empty talk which he emits through his lips. All of these are continued throughout his literary presentation in the *Timarion*. The moment Theodore has recognized who the newly-dead corpse actually is, he calls out loudly and wantonly (ἀνεβόησε ... λαμυρόν).³⁸¹ Not surprisingly, one of the first things that come to his mind, is how he and Timarion shared in the splendid feasts (πολλάκις συνεισιτιάθην πολυτελῶς) back in the day in Constantinople, when Timarion attended to his lectures while Theodore held the 'sophistic chair' (σοφιστικὸν θρόνον).³⁸² We are left with no doubt about the real character of Theodore.

Timarion's first reaction to the encounter evokes shame (ὕπ' αἰδοῦς ἐπεπήγειν): he feels ashamed not to have recognized such a 'prominent' man (ὕπ' ἄνδρος, ὡς εφάινετο, μεγαλοπρεποῦς).³⁸³ The author of the satire, just as in many other places in the text, seems to be playing with the inherent ambivalence of the adjective μεγαλοπρεπής. As *Suda* attests, it denotes both someone who is 'spectacular' and the one 'who is burdened by the greatness of his expenditure' (ὁ ἐπὶ μεγέθει ἀναλωμάτων πονούμενος),³⁸⁴ and given what unfolds from here on, it is highly possible that it was this meaning that the author of the satire had in his mind. In this light then, the shame which Timarion feels is connected rather to the fact that the profligate sophistic yapper not only recognizes him, but also openly and in the presence of others declares that they both shared frequently in some splendid feasts: the facts that decent Timarion probably wished they had been left unmentioned.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁷ Further examples left unmentioned by *Suda* are abundant in Aristophanic comedies, for instance: *Frogs* 841, 1069; *Knights* 1374–1376; *Thesmophoriazousae* 1072–1074, *Clouds* 1002–1004, *Acharnians* 428–429.

³⁷⁸ See the reference to prattling over the wax-dolls in the above entry in *Suda*.

³⁷⁹ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 13: "In Attic comedy, for instance, feminine "chatter" (*Ialia*) signals the kind of language that the comic idiom and its "heroes" (both male and female) associate with weakness and effeminacy ... Thus the demagogue, the sophist, and the female serve as negative reference points for constituting praiseworthy male behaviors and their attendant discourses." Also see *ibid.* 119, 209, 271, 299–300.

³⁸⁰ For this see WORMAN 172–186.

³⁸¹ BALDWIN translates it as an adverb 'clearly,' but the primary meaning of λαμυρός is related to greediness/wantonness. For this see *Suda* λ 106. But surely, the text plays upon the double-meaning of the word.

³⁸² *Timarion* 23.579–584.

³⁸³ *Timarion* 23.585–586.

³⁸⁴ *Suda* μ 369.

³⁸⁵ Especially, if we consider the fact that the feasts might relate both the physical meals and to the feasts of words that Timarion was served while attending to Theodore's school in Constantinople.

Theodore's μεγαλοπρεπεία is quickly revealed by one of Timarion's guides in Hades. He explains at once to Timarion who the skeleton-like babblers are: he is the most wanton/greedy sophist (λαμυρόν), who secured a great fame for himself by delivering haughty (σεμνῶν) and distinct (λαμπρῶν) speeches.³⁸⁶ Upon learning this, Timarion readily recognizes his former teacher, whose trademarks were, as he comments, the 'distinctness of his speeches,' (λαμπρότητα λόγου) the 'puffed up mouth' (διόγκωσιν στόματος) and 'the great size of his body' (σώματος εὐμεγεθίαν).³⁸⁷ Thus, the first memories of Theodore which come to Timarion's mind, are related primarily to Theodore's mouth: the specificity of his oral style, the empty talk and his fatness. Indeed, it is hard to escape the impression that Timarion does not perceive his former teacher in a positive light: he is utterly surprised by the current skeleton-like figure of Theodore, which stands in stark contrast with how he looked like during his 'earthly' existence.³⁸⁸ Theodore seems to be a bit too thin and too healthy to be that morbidly fat yapper whom Timarion knew back in the day.

At the same time, Theodore shares several features with the iambic κόλαξ, a "grubber [who] will say anything to fill his empty belly,"³⁸⁹ and who always pursues shameful gain. He also shares a number of characteristics with the sophistic type of a tongue-bellied man (ἐγγλωττογάστωρ), a greedy and manipulative individual who keeps flapping his insatiable tongue only to cater to the needs of his own γαστήρ.³⁹⁰ Surely, just as every other iambic κόλαξ, Theodore loves to boast about himself and how the 'excesses' of his own mouth secured great pride and enormous amounts of money for himself:

In the life above, I delivered a lot of clap-trap that pleased Their Majesties, in return for which I earned many gold pieces and enjoyed many unusual benefits. But I squandered everything on extravagant banquets and sybaritic dinners. Well, you must know yourself, since you were often invited to dine with me, that the meals served at my table befitted a tyrant.³⁹¹

He openly and shamelessly admits to have delivered enormous quantities of empty talk (πολλά ... δημηγορῶν), which catered to the tastes and pleasures of the ruling classes (τοῖς βασιλεῦσι πρὸς χάριν). The verb δημηγορέω, which Theodore uses in the form of participle, is almost always used in negative sense. In Platonic dialogues it is associated with the sophistic types who are prone to over-production of speech.³⁹² Thus, Theodore openly admits to the fact that he engaged in yapping only to get money from the rich representatives of the ruling classes, the money which he consequently spent on the Sybaritic enjoyments, to the result that he had hardly any penny left in his pockets. Indeed, the only things that Theodore seems to be interested in, even while being already dead in Hades, is speaking, eating and money.

As Worman pointed out, the main target of iambic insult, with its 'obsessive' focus on mouth and its uncontrolled actions, is to expose the weak, effeminate and dangerous behavioural types. To be sure, all these features can be discerned in the literary presentation

³⁸⁶ *Timarion* 23.589–591. It is hard to escape the feeling, that the author once more plays here on the ambivalence of the words σεμνός/λαμπρός. He is careful to choose only those adjectives which are inherently ambivalent.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 23.593–595.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 23.595–600

³⁸⁹ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 294; 220. Theophrastus, *Characters* II.

³⁹⁰ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 84. For the famous Gorgias of Loentinoi represented as ἐγγλωττογάστωρ in Aristophanic comedies see *Birds* 1695–1702; *Wasps* 471. For ἐγγλωττογάστωρ in Byzantine tradition see Suda ε 141; Tzetzes, *Chiliades* 10.353 and *Letters* 75.17.

³⁹¹ *Timarion* 24.602–607.

³⁹² For this see *LSJ*.

of the sophist from Smyrna. In the previous chapter I have attempted to argue that in the circle of Greek tradition, the γαστήρ-driven desire for food was conceptualized as a 'feminine' drive which emasculated those who succumbed to it and we have seen how στωμυλία was associated with weak and effeminate comportment. Such an interconnection between gluttony and effeminacy could not have any escaped any of the readers (or listeners) of the *Timarion*. Theodore himself reveals his own weakness and exposes the deadly dangers of such a consumption-driven lifestyle. He admits that he glutted himself to such a point that the gout which resulted from his overeating consumed his body and his soul (ἀφ'ὧν ἀλγηδόνες ἐπιγινόμεναι τὴν τε ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ σῶμα κατέτρυχον).³⁹³ It is only now in Hades, as Theodore professes, that he pursues a 'philosophical way of living' (φιλόσοφος διαίτα) and has managed to tame his raging stomach (τὴν μαργῶσαν γαστέρα) on a strict 'Hadesian' diet.³⁹⁴ Moreover, now that he no longer has to meddle with 'sophistic speeches' (σοφιστεία λόγων) and 'crowd-pleasing' (κομπότης δημοπρέπεις), he is all into philosophy and culture.³⁹⁵ Yet these are, as Krallis noticed, blatant lies professed by a manipulative sophistic type,³⁹⁶ and it is no accident that Theodore is presented here through the lenses of his insatiable belly, profligate lifestyle and his sophistic yapping maw.

Once more, the anonymous author of the *Timarion* exposes the tension between the corrupt orators ready to win with their words any possible gain for themselves, and the intellectuals who apparently did not fare too well under the Komnenian regime. The juxtaposition of these two literary characters, Theodore, who wallowed in luxury because he chose to play by the rules of the cultural game of his time, and Timarion, clad in humble clothes, notorious for his verbal and consumptive ἐγκράτεια, and for his propensity towards the truth are reminiscent of symbolic representations of philosophy and rhetoric written by Manuel Karantenos. According to him, while philosophy can be pictured as a humble and virtuous woman, rhetoric is similar to an effeminate, richly clad youth, who loves the 'pleasures of Aphrodite, 'takes pleasure in empty prattle (στωμυλία), is characterized by his clamorous voice and is utterly deceitful.³⁹⁷

The real character of Theodore is revealed the moment he agrees to help his former pupil win the case before the tribunal in Hades. Despite his previous profession of rejecting the excesses of rhetoric, the sophist immediately returns to his previous behavioural patterns. As he blatantly admits:

I have a keenness of mind that can sharply combat any counterattack and that is quick to fasten on the appropriate response to any rival arguments. I also have a ready wit, that knows how to come up with the killing epigram, a fluent and lucid style in general, and some medical jargon as well. Armed with all this, I shall find a *point d'appui*, however small, for my brief and shall wrestle these clever medical-type pagan gods to the ground.³⁹⁸

As we can see, Theodore is all ready to fight and 'wrestle down' (καταπαλαίω) the judicial tribunal. Despite the fact that just a moment ago the sophist seemed to have been happy with simplicity of life in Hades, and he was all into philosophy and clean diet, he readily jumps into

³⁹³ *Timarion* 24.610–611.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 24.613–618.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 24.619–622.

³⁹⁶ KRALLIS, 'Harmless Satire' 229.

³⁹⁷ Manuel Karantenos, *On Philosophy and Rhetoric*. For a discussion of this work see ROILS, *Amphoteroglossia* 31, and more generally on rhetoric in twelfth-century Byzantium *ibid.* 27–32.

³⁹⁸ *Timarion* 27.684–691

his old shoes. Almost at once he returns to his aggressive verbal behaviours and devises an angry harangue against the gods and doctors of old.³⁹⁹ Theodore's real sophistic nature is fully exposed just a moment prior to the trial: Timarion, apprehensive about its outcome, voices his anxiety to the sophist. Upon hearing this, Theodore shamelessly responds that the only thing Timarion should be concerned with is to provide Theodore with the agreed payment of fatty food which will be brought to him from the upper world.⁴⁰⁰ Notwithstanding his previous profession, he still proves to be a greedy ἐγγλωττογάστρω, who will tell anything to satiate his belly with food that he likes.

Theodore's subsequent behavior reveals that the philosophical stance which he purportedly chose to follow in Hades was merely a smokescreen. Driven by the prospect of the payment, once the tribunal starts, Theodore is so impatient to talk that he elbows Timarion backwards (ῥήσας με ἀγκῶνι εἰς τοῦπίσω), and pleads Timarion's case before the judges.⁴⁰¹ A moment later, when the sophist begins his defending speech, he returns to his loud-mouthed yapping:

The ushers interrupted this exchange by hissing at us, whereupon the sophist puffed open his mouth in his usual style, solemnised his features, folded his hands, and boomed forth piercingly (τορὸν τι μάλα) ...⁴⁰²

In this way, he is once again presented in the guise of a greedy iambic speechifier, who is driven by the incontinency of his own tongue. This is further reinforced by Theodore's comportment during the break of the court proceedings. When he satiated himself for a moment with his loud and angry talk, he feels the urge to fill his stomach: he sends Timarion to a nearby orchard to pluck some vegetables and bring back some of them to himself.⁴⁰³

Without a doubt, all the actions of Theodore are triggered by the insatiability of his mouth. As a matter of fact, as Dimitris Krallis has already noticed, the entire speech that he delivers in defense of his former pupil is a rhetorical show-off of a speechifier who is greedy for plaudit and food.⁴⁰⁴ Put differently: he is not the ἐγκρατής philosopher whom he professed to be, but a wanton yapper who does not miss any chance to engage in loud-mouthed sophistic perorations.

Final indications of derogatory treatment by the author of the *Timarion* can be found at the end of the satire. Krallis has already pointed out that one of the last scenes of the dialogue is particularly telling. Once Timarion closes his account and tells Kydion how his case was finally won, he recounts his walk through the 'gardens of philosophers,' where he meets Parmenides, Pythagoras, Melissos, Anaxogras, Diogenes, Cato, John Italos and Michael Psellos.⁴⁰⁵ Kydion, of course, is more interested in how Theodore was received among this crowd of the φιλόσοφοι. As it turns out: he was not. Quite conversely, he at once associated himself with Polemon, Herodes Atticus and Aelios Aristides, the great figures of the Second

³⁹⁹ Ibid. 28.

⁴⁰⁰ *Timarion*, 31.772–776.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. 32.785–787.

⁴⁰² Ibid. 33.826–829. Cf. Ibid. 1006 (also with reference to Theodore): καὶ ὁ σοφιστὴς μάλα εὐρὺ ἀνεβόησεν.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. 36.895–903. It is interesting that we are only allowed to see Timarion eating vegetables, he refuses to feast on any other food that he is proposed to in Hades, which, again, might be emphasizing his continence. Of course, gluttonous Theodore does not have any other option and feasts on whatever is available in the underworld. After all: beggars can't be choosers.

⁴⁰⁴ KRALLIS, 'Harmless Satire' 228: "Given his earlier statement on the importance of philosophy, truth, and exact knowledge, one would expect Theodore to delve in the strengths or weaknesses of Timarion's case. This does not happen."

⁴⁰⁵ *Timarion* 43.

Sophistic, the ῥητοροσοφιστᾶι, they were the only ones whom Theodore was able to converse with.⁴⁰⁶

Yet, even more telling is the final encounter between Timarion and the ‘great’ sophist from Smyrna. Being officially acquitted, Timarion embarks on his journey back and, striking their last hail and farewell, Theodore at last provides the list of foodstuffs that he wants to be sent to him from the upper world:

My boy, please send me a live-month-old lamb, two three- year-old hens that have been fattened and slaughtered, the kind the poulterers sell in the market, I mean the kind that good butchers have removed the stomach fat from and laid it across their thighs on the outside, and a one-month-old suckling pig and a nice fat and fleshy sow’s belly.⁴⁰⁷

Timarion feels obliged to grant Theodore’s request for payment, but how he grants it, is of utmost importance to the meaning of the entire dialogue. Thus, he asks his friend to collect the requested foodstuffs and to organize their transport to the underworld. Timarion is very particular about the way of the delivery of comestibles to Theodore. He clearly instructs his friend that the order cannot under any circumstances (μόνον ἔστωσαν μή ...) performed by those men who stick to clean diet and are revered, who would most probably loathe to perform this task (οἱ τάχα ἂν μυσαχθήσονται τὴν διακονίαν). On the contrary, it must be done by the dirty-eating Paphlagonians (ῥυπαροδιαίτων Παφλαγόνων).⁴⁰⁸

What does Timarion mean? Does he mention the Paphlagonians merely because they were perceived as rustic swineherds, and hence were able to provide the requested suckling-pig to Theodore? This is possible, but a more nuanced reading is possible. Timarion is careful enough to distinguish here those who eat clean (καθαροδιαίτων) from those who feast on vile food (ῥυπαροδιαίτων) and if we turn back to the beginning of the satire, we can see that he numbers among those who live and eat clean.⁴⁰⁹ Clearly, he associates Theodore with foul food and thereby discards any ideological association between himself and the sophist. At the same time, the very mention of the Paphlagonians plays crucial role in this closing section of the satire. It not an accident that the aggressive yapper from Aristophanes’ *Knights* was nicknamed ‘Paphlagon,’ as the sobriquet is intimately connected to the verb παφλάζω, which means ‘to splutter, or ‘to bluster.’ Suda explains its meaning as follows:

Paflazonta: noisy and bubbling up [men] ‘The man is burbling,’ i.e. he growls, he is bothered. It is formed from the verb *paflazein*: this means to conquer someone in speaking or to be knocked out [by speaking]. For Cleon was this kind of man. Or else, to be disturbed, for to burble denotes primarily the sound of the sea which is resounding with the waves.⁴¹⁰

Hence, through the mention of the Paphlagonians, Theodore is not merely associated to his appetite for vile food. He clearly links his former teacher to the aggressive verbal comportment which are associated with the violent yapper from Aristophanes’ *Knights*. By doing so he overtly distances himself from Theodore and reinforces once again his insulting literary presentation as an abusive, loud-mouthed speechifier who wags his tongue and is

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. 45.1139–1146. Discussed by KRALLIS, ‘Harmless Satire’ 228.

⁴⁰⁷ Timarion 45.1158–1164.

⁴⁰⁸ Timarion 47.1190–1196.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. 3.71–72: καὶ εἶχεν ἡμῖν τό τε ψυχίδιον εὐθύμως, τό τε σωμάτων ὑγιῶς. This is also the reason why Timarion chooses to eat vegetables in Hades. For the Paphlagonians see KRALLIS, ‘Harmless Satire’ 244.

⁴¹⁰ Suda π 827: Παφλάζοντα: ἡχοῦντα, ἀναζέοντα. ἀνήρ παφλάζει, βράζει, τετάρακται. πεποιήται δὲ παρὰ τὸ παφλάζειν. Παφλάζειν δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ λαλοῦντά τινα κρατεῖσθαι καὶ ἀνακόπτεσθαι: τοιοῦτος δὲ ἦν καὶ ὁ Κλέων: ἢ τὸ ταρασσέσθαι: παφλάζειν γὰρ κυρίως σημαίνει τὸ ἡχεῖν τὴν κυμαινομένην θάλατταν.

always hungry for more foul food. In other words, the Paphlagonians epitomize the foul character of Theodore and all the sophistic types characteristic of the Komnenian era.

3.4. Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I have shown how various Byzantine authors of the twelfth century equated broadly understood literary production with the acts of preparing and consuming food. I have attempted to argue that on the one hand, they consciously explored the *τόπος* which dates to the times of classical Athenian literature and was passed to Byzantium via Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*, a work that was vastly popular in the Byzantine long twelfth century, commencing with Psellos. At the very same time, the Byzantine literati did not limit themselves to the blind limitation of this *τόπος*. Quite conversely, they voiced through it the present-day literary discussions regarding the value and the mutual status of rhetoric versus philosophy, as well as the social concerns which were specific to their times.

If literary/rhetorical production was understood in terms of consumption, then it was only natural that the authors started to voice their concerns through the language of consumption, thus they used the device which was vastly present in Greek culture from the times of archaic iambic poetry. Of course, consumption, even when treated metaphorically as literary production, cannot be always cast in positive light, and we have already seen in the previous chapter how Michael Psellos used the iambic language of consumption to denigrate their opponents in the eleventh-century *λογικοὶ ἀγῶνες*. With the advent of the Komnenian dynasty the social realities changed drastically. Together with the administrative reorganization of the Empire, the literati were made to compete in the rhetorical *θέατρα* in order to attract the attention of the wealthy patrons, while the freedom of intellectual pursuit, especially in terms of philosophy after the trial and condemnation of Psellos' student, John Italos, was limited. Certainly, the competition must have been fierce among the intellectuals and the system seems to have promoted, often, those who were willing to sacrifice their morality for the sake of their patron's money and catered to the literary tastes and political agenda of the wealthy aristocrats, chiefly from the Komnenian clan.

I have been attempting to show that the *Timarion* should be read against such a background, and that it should not be understood as an innocent, 'harmless satire' to use the term coined by Dimitris Krallis. Gluttony, which is so ubiquitous in the satire, does not merely mock the propensity of the twelfth-century Byzantines towards lavish drinking and eating. When considered against the background of the aesthetics and literary mechanics of iambic discourse, it gains additional deeper meanings. I have been arguing throughout this chapter that the *Timarion* essentially exposes the excesses of the 'mouth' within the Komnenian cultural arrangement that promoted loud-mouthed sophistic yappers, who were prone to produce any kind of empty talk for as long as they were paid for it. Those who refused to participate in such a corrupt system, because they were focused on philosophy and truth-seeking, were, if we believe the *Timarion*, either doomed to live in poverty or reluctantly associate themselves with the dirty Paphlagonians. This last fact is all the more telling if we consider the fact that the members of the Komnenian dynasty came from the province of Paphlagonia: is *Timarion*, as Krallis suggests, holding the Komnenoi responsible for all the cultural outrages of his time? The affirmative answer is indeed tempting.

4. EATING UP THE STATE: COMIC/IAMBIC GLUTTONS IN NIKETAS CHONIAATES' HISTORY

In the previous chapters, I have attempted to show how iambic discourse and comic imagery were appropriated in innovative ways in the literary invectives composed by Psellos and how it was employed by the anonymous author of the *Timarion*. I have also expounded what functions the insulting talk of *iambos* played within the diverging performative context of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Constantinopolitan θέατρα.

With Niketas Choniates' *History*, I would like to enter into completely entirely different territory, time, and context within which literary iambic/comic discourse was appropriated.⁴¹¹ I have argued elsewhere that Choniates, himself an eye-witness of the cataclysmic events of 1204, must have been deeply aware that the traditional generic boundaries had to be expanded, or even trespassed, to pay due justice to the narrative of the collapse of Byzantine empire during the Fourth Crusade.⁴¹² Indeed, it must have posed an enormous challenge for him to produce a satisfactory account of what seemed to have been the end of the known world for Choniates and his fellow citizens, who were all made to flee to Nikaia where the remnants of the imperial were reestablished. Having lost his house in Constantinople, reduced to poverty Choniates was about to lead the last years of his life in foreign and barbaric land.⁴¹³

Such a struggle to discover suitable words as well as forms of expression is best gleaned from a plethora of revisions of the original text of the *History* which are witnessed by its complex manuscript transmission.⁴¹⁴ Analysing it, Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis argued that the fall of Constantinople and the exile affected Choniates so deeply, that at some point he fell short of words and ceased writing his *History* for a longer period of time.⁴¹⁵ It was certainly the political (since Choniates served in the public administration in Constantinople)⁴¹⁶ and deeply personal context must have led Choniates to see historical discourse as an interplay of both comedy and tragedy.⁴¹⁷ The purpose of the history, according to Choniates, is both to extol the noble deeds and to mock (κωμῶδεῖν) the wicked:

⁴¹¹ Though, having in mind that all of the most important literati of the twelfth century were direct and indirect literary heirs of Psellos: S. EFTHYMIADIS, "Quand Nicétas Choniates a pris la plume: la genèse d'une œuvre historiographique", in: *La face cachée de la littérature byzantine. Le texte en tant que message immediate. Actes du colloque international, Paris 5-6-7 juin 2008 organisé par Paolo Odorico en mémoire de Constantin Leventis*, P. Odorico (ed.), Paris 2012, 221–236 analysed the intertextual relationship between

⁴¹² The argument presented here is a modified and extended version proposed in T. LABUK, "Aristophanes". Surely, such generic experiments were standard features of the twelfth-century literary "Komnenian modernism". For the discussion of new genres in the twelfth century see for instance: P. AGAPITOS, "New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The schedourgia of Theodore Prodromos," *Medioevo Greco* 15 (2015) 1–41; Psellos' and Anna Komnene's experiments with genre and generic inclusions within historiography, hagiography were discussed by M. MULLETT, "Novelisation in Byzantium" in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott*, J. Burke (ed.), Brisbane 2006, 14–21. Also see I. NILSSON, "Archaists and Innovators: Byzantine 'Classicism' and Experimentation with Genre in the Twelfth Century," in *Genrer och genreproblem: Teoretiska och historiska perspektiv*, B. Agrell – I. Nilsson (eds.) Göteborg 2003, 413–424.

⁴¹³ Niketas Choniates *History* 579.70–580.96.

⁴¹⁴ For this see A. SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study*. Oxford 2012, 68–124, and EADEM, "Before and After 1204: The Versions of Niketas Choniates' 'Historia,'" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 60 (2006) 189–221.

⁴¹⁵ J. NIEHOFF-PANAGIOTIDIS, "Narrative Bewältigungsstrategien von Katastrophenerfahrungen: Das Geschichtswerk des Nikitas Honiatis," *Klio* 92 (2010) 170–210; the English version of the article available in IDEM, "Telling the Unthinkable. Niketas Choniates' Account of the Fourth Crusade," in *Erfahrung und Geschichte: Historische Sinnbildung im Pränarrativen* Th. Beuer–D. Kreutz (eds.), Berlin–New York 2019, 277–300.

⁴¹⁶ For the overview of Choniates' career and life see: SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates* 11–67.

⁴¹⁷ The presence of comedy and tragedy in the Χρονική Διύγησις was discussed by A. KALDELLIS, "Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History," in: *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, ed. S. Efthymiadis–A. Simpson.

Historical narratives have been invented as a useful thing in [human] life, since the best insights can be derived from them by those who take interest in them. Through exhibiting the past events, they both clearly label the conduct of people and present valuable experiences of high-minded men, who nourish their passion for good by their nature; and by making the comedy of wickedness (καὶ κακία δὲ παρ' αὐταῖς κωμωδουμένη) as well as extolling nobleness in historical discourse, for the most part, it presents those who are temperate and those who are willing to appropriate [the substance of others] for their own use, and shows who are inclined to take the first path or the latter ...⁴¹⁸

In the light of what I have discussed in the previous chapters, the usage of the participle derived from the verb κωμωδέω should not surprise, and Choniates was not the first byzantine historian to embed the genre of comedy in the historical narrative. Commenting on Procopius' of Caesarea *Anekdotai*, the entry of Suda mentions that the work contains invective (ψόγους) and mockery of Justinian and Theodora.⁴¹⁹ Building on the comment in *Suda*, Anthony Kaldellis showed how Procopius embedded Aristophanic material in his narrative in the form of allusions and direct quotations in order to abuse Justinianic regime.⁴²⁰ Choniates, as I intend to prove, uses a similar technique of incorporating comic material and iambic aesthetics into historical discourse of the *History*.

Without any doubt, a deeper logic stood behind interpolating comic/iambic discursive schemes into the historical discourse, which, in his eyes, played an important corrective and ethical function. The rationale behind incorporating comedy into the discourse of history can be seen once again in the introduction to *History*, where Choniates explicitly uses a term derived from Aristophanic *Plutus* (ἐξτοψεύσαντες).⁴²¹ The term is evoked here not as a means of a rhetorical show-off, but rather to remind the reader of the main ethical theme of Aristophanic comedy, that is justice and wealth.⁴²² Just as Aristophanes in his *Plutus*, Choniates provides a moral lesson to his readers: they should clearly see the consequences of good and evil and choose which path to follow.⁴²³

Geneva 2009, 75–100, at 84 and V. KATSAROS, “Το δραματικό στοιχείο στα ιστοριογραφικά έργα του 11ου και του 12ου αιώνα (Μιχαήλ Ατταλειάτης, Μιχαήλ Ψελλός, Ευστάθιος Θεσσαλονίκης, Νικήτας Χωνιάτης),” in *L'Écriture de la mémoire: la littérature de l'historiographie, Actes du IIIe colloque international «ERMHNEIA», Nicosie, 6–7–8 mai 2004*, P. Odorico–P. Agapitos–M. Hintenberger (eds.). Paris 2006, 281–316.

⁴¹⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 1.5–11: Αἱ ἱστορίαι δὲ ἄρα κοινωφελές τι χρῆμα τῷ βίῳ ἐφεύρηνται, εἴπερ ἐκ τούτων οὐκ ὀλίγα ἔστι ξυλλέγειν τὰ βελτίω τοῖς ἡρημένοις. εἰδυῖαι γὰρ τὰ ἀρχαῖα καὶ ἔθνη αὗται διατρανοῦσιν ἀνθρώπεια καὶ πολυπειρίαν ὑποτιθέασιν ὅποσοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων μεγαλογνώμονες καὶ τοῦ καλοῦ αὐτόφυτον τρέφοντες ἔρωτα· καὶ κακία δὲ παρ' αὐταῖς (scil. ἱστορίαις) κωμωδουμένη καὶ ἀγαθοπραξία ἐξαιρομένη μετρίους ὥς τὰ πολλὰ καὶ ἐπιιδόντας τοὺς παρ' ἐκάτερα τιθέασι ρέποντας ...

⁴¹⁹ *Suda* π, 2479

⁴²⁰ A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius: The Secret History with Related Texts*. Cambridge 2010, xxxvii. For a short comparison of the Secret History and Choniates' work see IDEM, *Ethnography after Antiquity. Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*. Philadelphia 2013, 53.

⁴²¹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 2.14; Aristophanes, *Plutus* 34, *Suda* ε 642.

⁴²² A.M. BOWIE, *Aristophanes. Myth, Ritual and Comedy*. Cambridge 1993, 274

⁴²³ See a more extended discussion of this correlation in LABUK, “Aristophanes in the Service of Niketas Choniates.”

4.1. 'Iambic Ethos' and Historical Discourse

My main aim of the present chapter will be to analyse how Choniates operates with iambic/comic discursive scheme in numerous passages in the *History*. It will be my chief assertion that Choniates consciously re-used and appropriated Aristophanic and iambic tradition throughout the cards of his *History*. I would like to contend as well that this appropriation can be visible on different discursive levels: in numerous direct and indirect intertextual allusions to the ancient Greek comic tradition (chiefly Aristophanic comedies), through the exploration of the motifs which derived from iambic/comic material and through the employment of overtly iambic aesthetics, which are clearly identifiable in the episodes and which will be scrutinized in this chapter. These include, just as was the case in Psellos' invectives, focusing on the appetitive and effeminizing needs of the body, reconfiguring the body, presenting it in embarrassing positions, reducing body to its digestive organs as well metonymic uses of the mouth and consumed foodstuffs.

Yet, more importantly, just as in the previous chapters, I would like to go far beyond the assertions that Choniates operates with comic/iambic imagery and its literary techniques and focus on deeper meanings of iambic discourse explored throughout the cards of his *History*. Hence, what will be of chief interest to me in the following chapter is what function the iambic discourse plays in the piece of the twelfth-century historiographic work, how it was mapped onto the body politic by Choniates and what were the consequences of such a stylistic device. In addition, it will be my overarching assertion that the employment of iambic/comic motifs within historiographical discourse plays the corrective function: the gluttoned, drunken, effeminate and fragmented body of the court officials, the babbling and devouring maw are, along the lines of iambic ethics, paragons of behavioral patterns which posed mortal dangers to the well-being and survival of the Empire.

For the sake of the clarity of the argument, the analysis will be divided in two subsequent thematic sections. The first part shall focus on four episodes which, due to their common "concretedly crude" aesthetics, the exploration of comic/iambic motifs can easily be understood as comic interpolations into the discourse of history. These will include the two longer humorous episodes related to the gluttonous officials from the retinue of Manuel I Komnenos: John of Poutza and John Kamateros, and two shorter literary portrayals of Constantine Mesopotamites (a high-ranking official from the retinue of Isaakios Angelos) as well as fat Thomas, who arrived at Constantinople after the siege of the city in 1204 to replace the Patriarch of Constantinople. Just as in the previous chapter, frequent recourses will be made to other passages of Choniates' work as well as to other ancient Greek literary works in order to compare and elucidate the cover meanings hidden behind the surface level reading.

The second section of the chapter shall concentrate on a slightly different, yet complementary application of iambic discourse in the *History*. The focal point of my analysis shall move to the elements of iambic discourse present in the literary portrayal of Andronikos I Komnenos, the cruelest tyrant in the entire history of the Byzantine Empire, whose bloody reign Choniates witnessed by his own eye. As I intend to show, along with the main tenets of iambic discourse singled out by Worman, the iambic imagery employed in the imperial biography of Andronikos revolves primarily around his all-devouring jaws and maw (γνάθοι, γένυς) to which Choniates reduces his body in several passages. As the narrative unfolds, the

deadly jaws of the tyrant become an intricate metonymy which serves to indicate that Andronikos is everything that the Byzantine emperor should not be.⁴²⁴

4.2. Consuming the Empire

Almost at the outset of the *History*, in the narrative related to the reign of emperor John II Komnenos, just before John dies because of the self-inflicted wound during hunting, Choniates puts a fictitious speech in emperor's mouth. This address serves as an explanation of John's preference of his younger son Manuel over his older brothers as an heir to the Byzantine throne and sets some of the themes that permeate the entire *History*:

These will occur if we cling to the right hand and the arm of the highest and mightiest God, so that we are not given by him the ruler who is the devourer of his [own] people, who beguiles its reputation, who is capricious in terms of his behaviour, and stoops down over the table holding his fingers fast on the wine ladle, never withdrawing from the quarters of the palace, just as it is represented in those pictures laid on the walls with the mosaics and frescoes, who likes to direct the affairs of the humans according to his liking and seeing them accomplished [as he likes]. From the very outset, all things depend upon him ...⁴²⁵

Δημοβορία, hence literary 'devouring of one's own people,' stands as one on the most important leitmotifs of Choniates' *History*. At times, it is treated figuratively and merely points to the greediness of the ruling classes, who consume the resources of the state and exact public money for their own use.⁴²⁶ At others, as I will show in the case of Andronikos, the theme of δημοβορία is taken quite literally and it refers to the murderous nature of the tyrant who, like another Polyphemos, feasts on other people.

Following Worman, I have pointed out that the belly-driven δημοβορία is closely linked to iambic discourse.⁴²⁷ It is related to a character of hungering and greedy king known from the archaic Greek iambic poetry: they appropriate and feed on the substance of others, get more than their allotted share and thereby violate the rules of their social groups. Δημοβορία firmly attaches the organs of the belly and the mouth: the rapacious and savage ways in which they consume is mirrored in how they comport themselves in terms of their mouth (conceived of as an organ that produce speech and which ingests food). Understood in this way, this iambic δημοβορία resurfaces in various episodes within Choniates' *History*.

The first instance where such motifs are intentionally explored by Choniates occurs in a short narrative related to a greedy tax collector, John of Poutza (ὁ ἐκ Πούτζης Ἰωάννης).⁴²⁸ Acting as the chief collector of the taxes, John first devises a policy to divert the funds which

⁴²⁴ As SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates* 144 remarked: "Niketas' presentation and assessment of the imperial figures rests on the traditional qualities of the ideal ruler as expounded by the earlier authors and is inextricably interwoven with the idea that the well-being of the state ultimately depends on its emperor." At the same time, it is worth noting that Choniates is probably the first Byzantine author to apply iambic/comic imagery to the Byzantine emperor. The only possible counterpart could probably be Michael III ('The Drunkard') as represented in the *Vita Basilii* 20–23.

⁴²⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 42.59–66.

⁴²⁶ See for instance *Iliad* 1.231; Hesiod *Works and Days* 38–39, 220–21, 263–64

⁴²⁷ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 30.

⁴²⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 57.53–66. For a short discussion of the individual himself see SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates* 205–206 and 271; H. MAGOULIAS, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*. Detroit 1994, xix and xxv; EFTHYMIADIS, "Niketas Choniates: The Writer" 49–50. I am presenting here a modified version of the argument which I have proposed in LABUK, "Aristophanes in the Service of Niketas Choniates."

were supposed to be spent on the imperial fleet, and, wielding almost an absolute authority, he quickly becomes greedy for an unjust gain.⁴²⁹ Similarly to Sabbaites in Psellos' invective, John abuses his position of power to gain as much as he is possible:

Suffering from meanness and stinginess, he often sent back to the market those foodstuffs which were dispatched to him. For example: the *suax* and the *labrax*, the biggest and the fattest ones, which were sent to him by some people; he sold them thrice and he brought in for himself the fish sold alternately just as many times by others according to the need. And straight on the fish became fishers: those who had been afflicted were now doing their act, and, as if by releasing a huge fish-hook and placing fat on it as though it was tiny bait, they were alluring into their home those people who were passing by.⁴³⁰

Together with the mention of two species of fish, Choniates introduces the motifs characteristic of iambic discourse.⁴³¹ The very fact that John chooses the fattest and biggest ones of them only underscores John's belly-driven covetousness. As one of the entries in *Suda* attests λάβραξ was a proverbial sobriquet used to mock someone's greediness:

Labrax (sea bass): a species of fish and a proverb: "Milesian sea bass." And this name was given because they gaped their mouths wide open and greedily and hastily gulped down their bait. For this reason, they could be caught with ease ... Miletus, is a city in Asia where many sea bass live, since the marsh pours forth into the sea here. Because these fishes like fresh water, they run up from the sea to the marsh and in this way their population is numerous near Miletus.⁴³²

What is of interest in the above entry is an interconnection of rapacity and the gaping mouth: λάβραξ became a proverbial pun on a greedy person precisely because the fish gaped its mouth widely (κέχνηεν αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα), and consumed the bait ravenously and violently. Yet, the comic/iambic overtone of calling someone λάβραξ goes even further: it might have pointed not only to the uncontrolled consuming passions of the person named in this way, but also to their complete stupidity.⁴³³ After all, it is precisely because of their voraciousness the sea basses could easily be allured and caught, as the entry informs us. Moreover, the close relationship of λάβραξ, rapacious consumption and the mouth can be gleaned from another entry in *Suda* (λ 7), which comments shortly on the noun λαβραγόρης:

⁴²⁹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 55.5–56.24.

⁴³⁰ Ibid. 56.44–57.52: καὶ σμικρολογίαν νοσῶν καὶ γλισχρότητα καὶ τὰ πεμπόμενα πολλάκις τῶν ἐδωδῖμων ἀνέπεμπεν εἰς τὸ πωλητήριον· καὶ δεῖγμα, ὡς ἰχθύας σύακα καὶ λάβρακα, ὡς μὲν μεγίστους ὡς δὲ πίονας, παρά τινων αὐτῷ πεμφθέντας, τρισάκις ἀπέδοτο καὶ τοσαυτάκις ἐναλλάξ ἐωνημένους κατὰ χρεῖαν παρ' ἐτέρων εἰσηνέγκατο. καὶ ἦσαν ἀντικρυς ἀλιεῖς οἱ ἰχθύες, ὃ πεπόνθασιν δρῶντες, ὡς μὲν ἄγκιστρον χαλῶντες τὸ μέγεθος, περιτιθέντες δὲ τὴν πιμελὴν ὡς δελήτιον, καὶ οὕτω κατασπῶντες τοὺς παριόντας εἰς τὴν ἐκείνων εἰσοίκησιν

⁴³¹ For a discussion see N. ZORZI, *La Storia di Niceta Coniata, Libri I–VIII. Giovanni II e Manuele I Comneno. Materiali per un Commento*. Venezia 2012, 104. Both species were discussed by M. CHRONE-VAKALOPOULOS – A. VAKALOPOULOS, *Fishes and Other Aquatic Species in the Byzantine Literature. Classification, Terminology and Scientific Names*. *Byzantina Symmeikta* 18 (2008) 123–157 at 125. For λάβραξ see Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* VII 86.17–19.

⁴³² *Suda* λ 8: Λάβραξ: εἶδος ἰχθύος. καὶ παροιμία· λάβρακας Μιλησίους. τὴν δὲ προσηγορίαν πεποίηται, διότι κέχνηεν αὐτοῦ τὸ στόμα, καὶ ἀθρώως καὶ λάβρως τὸ δέλεαρ καταπίνει· ὅθεν καὶ εὐχερῶς ἀλίσκεται ... Μίλητος δὲ πόλις Ἀσίας, ἔνθα πολλοὶ γίνονται λάβρακες, διὰ τὴν ἐκδιδοῦσαν λίμνην εἰς θάλασσαν. χαίροντες γὰρ οἱ ἰχθύες τῷ γλυκεῖ ὕδατι εἰς τὴν λίμνην ἀνατρέχουσιν ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ οὕτω πληθύνουσι παρὰ Μιλησίους. The entry is taken from the scholia on *Knights* 361.

⁴³³ See my discussion of the stupidity of John Komnenos the Fat in the chapter 4.

λαβραγόρην: meaning him who speaks excessively during the assemblies.⁴³⁴

Such a comic/iambic focus on uncontrolled consumption and consumptive body becomes even more pronounced in the next section, where we can see how John's behaviour is similar to that of the voracious wide-mouthed λάβραξ:

At some other time ... while he was returning thence for a meal, when he spotted the food which was put forward on his way by the female tavern-keepers, which in the common speech is called *almaia*, he was overpowered with craving to gulp down the soup and nibble at the vegetable which was contained in it. Then, when one of his servants, who was called Anzas, told that he should now check and curb his appetite ... John, looking at him ferociously and fiercely, pressed very hard to satisfy his desire. And indeed, having greedily ripped the bowl from the hands of the female vendor he stooped down and, with his mouth wide open, he greedily slurped his small portion of soup and stuffed himself with the vegetable to the full.⁴³⁵

The passage is filled with various links to ancient comic tradition, which reinforce the iambic aesthetics explored in it. Similarly to a protagonist of Aristophanic *Knights*, the Paphlagon, John swallows ferociously his 'broth'.⁴³⁶ Moreover, just as other iambic gluttons, John cannot and is unwilling to curb his raging belly. Seeing a bowl of his favourite soup,⁴³⁷ he stops and immediately satisfies his urge.⁴³⁸

It is also interesting to note how Choniates concentrates on 'iambic' physicality. Indeed, the passage is pregnant with the expressions which refer to gulping (ἐμφορηθῆναι), nibbling (ἀποτραγεῖν), stuffing one's mouth (ἐνέχανε) and slurping (ἐνεφορεῖτο). Mouth and throat, in line with iambic aesthetics, becomes the focus point of insulting talk in the passage. Moreover, the mouth and the throat are endowed here with important symbolic significations. After all, the episode was not included by Choniates in the narrative merely for the sake of reader's amusement. It comes as a vivid exemplification of John's aberrant behavior. His ill-advised policies, and his excessive and uncontrollable consumptive patterns clearly point to the ways in which he exacts public funds for the sake of fulfilling his own desires. Just as iambic people-eating king and a gluttonous Athenian politician known from the Old Comedy, John wishes only to stuff his insatiable mouth and fill his belly to the full. The digestive organs of his body are treated here by Choniates as symbolic spaces which signify everything which endangers the well-being of the state.

Yet, the iambic aesthetic does not simply come down to patterns of greedy and violent consumption presented in the passage. According to Worman, the persistent feature of

⁴³⁴ *Suda* λ 8: Λαβραγόρην: σφοδρῶς δημηγοροῦντα. Surely, the λαβρ- derivatives are linked to all kinds of physical excesses cf. *Suda* λ 9.

⁴³⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 57.53–63: Ἄλλοτε δὲ διημερεύσας ἐς τὰ ἐν Βλαχέρναις ἀνάκτορα κάκειθεν πρὸς ὀψίαν ἐπαναλύων, ἐπεὶ θεάσαιτο παρὰ ταῖς καπηλίσιν προβεβλημένην ἐνόδιον ἐδώδην, ἣν ἡ κοινὴ διάλεκτος ἀλμαίαν ὠνόμασεν, ἡράσθη ζωμοῦ ἐμφορηθῆναι καὶ τῆς τοῦ λαχάνου σχίδακος ἀποτραγεῖν. εἰπόντος δὲ τινος τῶν ὑπηρετουμένων, ὃς Ἀνζᾶς ὠνομάζετο, ὡς νῦν μὲν χρεῶν ἀνασχέσθαι καὶ κολάσαι τὴν ἔφεσιν, εὐρήσει δὲ καὶ κατ' οἶκον γενόμενος ὃ ζητεῖ ὄψον παρατεθειμένον αὐτῷ εὐτρεπές, δριμύ καὶ τιτανῶδες ἐμβλέψας πολὺς ἐνέκειτο σχέδην ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα. ἀμέλει καὶ τὸ τρύβλιον ἀρπαλέως περιχυθεὶς ταῖς χερσὶ τῆς πωλητρίας ὀχούμενον, ὅπερ ἔστεγεν ἀρπαλέως περιχυθεὶς ταῖς χερσὶ τῆς πωλητρίας ὀχούμενον, ὅπερ ἔστεγεν ἔνδον τὸ ἐκεῖν ἑράσιμον ἔδεσμα, ἐγκύψας ἀμυστὶ καὶ χανδὸν ἐνεφορεῖτο τοῦ ζωμιδίου καὶ τῷ λαχάνῳ πολλάκις ἐνέχανε.

⁴³⁶ In Aristophanes, *Knights* 359–360, the chorus accuses the Paphlagon of swallowing 'the broth of the state.'

⁴³⁷ Ἀλμαία is also attested in the extant fragment of Aristophanes' *Merchant Ships*: *Lexica Segueriana* α 82.23: Ἀριστοφάνης Ὀλκάσιν· Ἀλμαίαν πιών. For a discussion and relevant bibliography on ἀλμαία and ζωμός (although, Zorzi did not discern any Aristophanic inspiration) see ZORZI, *La Storia di Niceta Coniata* 105.

⁴³⁸ DAVIDSON, *Courtesans* 146 notes that the fierceness of the desire is a standard trait of every comic glutton.

iambic discourse is its focus on all basic bodily desires, hence hunger, thirst and lust, all of which are closely interconnected. Henderson noticed that such a mutual connection stands at a core of the aesthetics of the Old Comedy:

The connection between eating and sex ... is related to the early pleasure of taking in food which constitutes a child's first strong feelings of gratification and enjoyment. The female genitalia are often compared to meats that are cooked ... and eaten ... and sauces, soups, and juices are used to indicate vaginal secretions.⁴³⁹

Indeed, Choniates might be allusively pointing to such a connection in the above-quoted passage related to the prodigious appetites of John of Poutza. To be sure, the above-mentioned excerpt from the commentary of Theodore Balsamon and the *Ptochoprodromika* show that the Byzantine authors were fully aware how such an 'iambic' imagery worked.⁴⁴⁰

Choniates leaves several hints which render such a reading more plausible. Thus, John is allured by the bowls of his favourite soup which is sold by some female tavern-keepers (καπηλίδες). Upon seeing this, he violently takes the bowl from a female seller (τῆς πωλητριάς). It is interesting to note that in the tradition of the Old Comedy the noun καπηλὶς was often used as a synonym of a prostitute and such a usage was employed by the Byzantine authors as well.⁴⁴¹ By the same token, another term which Choniates uses, πωλητρία, is another rare word which is directly derived from the Old Comic tradition, as is attested in the *Onomasticon* by Julius Pollux.⁴⁴² More than that, Choniates seems to consciously build the imagery of the passage around the notion of satisfying one's bodily desire. To be sure, he plays here with a double meaning of the verb ἐράω, which refers to all carnal desires, but chiefly to the lust for sexual pleasure. Thus, John is portrayed as being overcome with the desire for the soup (ἡράσθη ζωμοῦ) and when he is checked by his servant Anzas, he stubbornly insists on satisfying his urge (ἀποπλῆσαι τὸν ἔρωτα), and finally slurps his little portion of soup (ζωμίδιον).⁴⁴³

As a matter of fact, a closer comparative reading of the episode related to John's gluttony with Aristophanic material might point to even more iambic elements present in it. Following Henderson, I have already underlined that the licking of dishes was used in the Old Comic tradition as a metonym for licking female genitalia. In the *Ecclesiazusae*, for instance, Smoios, who is one of the protagonists of the play is depicted in one scene whilst "cleaning away female's bowls (τὰ τῶν γυναικῶν διακαθαίρει τρύβλια).⁴⁴⁴ Interestingly enough, John of Poutza is also depicted by Choniates whilst slurping out the soup from a τρύβλιον, which might

⁴³⁹ HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* 47.

⁴⁴⁰ GARLAND, "The Rhetoric of Gluttony" 48: "Without wanting to stress the point here, a number of these foods – the *zomos* or soup, *popana* or cakes, and *kuamoi* – have sexual connotations in Aristophanes, as indeed does the gluttonous enjoyment of food in general, of which Choniates could hardly have been unaware."

⁴⁴¹ For this see Psellos, *Letter* 97.17–24. And an anonymous fourteenth-century pamphlet edited and discussed by H. HUNGER, "Anonymes Pamphlet gegen eine byzantinische Mafia," *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 7 (1969), 95–107 at lines 9–17. On the connection of taverns and brothels see *Life of St. Theodore of Syceon: Vie de Théodore de Sykeôn* A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE (ed.). Bruxelles 1970, 288–301. Also see I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, "Byzantine Diet and Cuisine. In Between Ancient and Modern Gastronomy," in: *Flavours and Delights*, 43–69, at 44–49 and S. N. TROIANOS, Καπηλεία και εγκληματικότητα στον κόσμο του Βυζαντίου, in: *Essays in honor of C. D. Spinellis*, M. Galanou (ed.). Athena – Komotene 2010, 1285–1300

⁴⁴² Pollux, *Onomasticon* III 125.10–11 identifies the source of this noun as Hermippos, who was one of the authors in the Old Comic tradition.

⁴⁴³ Which is yet another term derived from Aristophanes, *Clouds* 389. For desire in the ancient comic tradition see HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* 37.

⁴⁴⁴ Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 837–847. Also see Aristophanes, *Peace* 716–717; Aristophanes, *Peace* 716–717; the imagery is discussed in HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* 47, 145, 186.

be read as yet another subtle intertextual allusion which underscores the sexual overtone of the passage.

Leaving aside the possible sexual overtones, in Aristophanic comedies, the τρύβλιον is often endowed with political meanings as well. One telling example of such a usage can be found in the *Knights*, where the Sausage Seller reveals to his interlocutor how easy it is to live parasitically at the expense of others:

With a couple of words, I will reveal to you how you can have quantities of anchovies for an obol; all you must do is to seize on all the dishes (τρύβλια) the merchants have.⁴⁴⁵

This brings us back again to the corrective function of the iambic discourse. To be sure, there was a deeper logic behind presenting John of Poutza in the guise of an iambic gluttonous parasite and hinting at the Old Comic tradition. The Paphlagon whose ‘name’ I have evoked several times in my discussion of the *Timarion*, was a sobriquet of Cleon, an Athenian politician whom Aristophanes derided for being sophistic manipulator and an extortionist who lived off the Athenian δῆμος. John’s portrayal in the *History* shares a number of important similarities: he abuses his absolute power, bestows extravagant donations on his family, exacts money even from the poorest ones, while his greediness is directly reflected in his prodigious appetites.⁴⁴⁶ Both in Aristophanic comedies and Choniates’ *History* the insulting talk of *iambos* and its consumptive imagery are used to expose the political exploitation which led the state to a collapse. Thus, Aristophanic demagogues “devour the public funds before they are allotted to them” and “squeeze people like figs,”⁴⁴⁷ the “reap the harvest of others”⁴⁴⁸ or glut themselves to sleep on the cakes which they steal from their people.⁴⁴⁹ John of Poutza’s uncontrolled desire to sup on his beloved ζωμίδιον plays a similar role and points at his corrupt nature. Moreover, just as in Aristophanic comedies, political exploitation seems to be equated by Choniates with sexually charged behaviours. In the *Knights* Paphlagon openly admits that he knows very well how to render δῆμος both “wide and narrow” (εὐρὺν καὶ στενόν),⁴⁵⁰ and I have attempted to show that Choniates might have peppered the episode related to John’s gluttony with sexual overtones, thus using similar iambic aesthetics to that found in Aristophanic comedies.

Therefore, it might be stated with a fair degree of certainty that by using the iambic motifs derived from Aristophanic tradition Choniates derides John of Poutza as a boorish, and greedy statesman whose only point of interest is his unjustly collected gain. Just as Cleon-Paphlagon from the Aristophanic play, John is characterized mainly through the uncontrolled activities of his insatiable mouth: his rapaciousness spans from the urges of his own stomach (gluttony), to the intemperate appetite for taxes which he exacts from the people.

⁴⁴⁵ Aristophanes, *Knights* 648–650: αὐτοῖς ἀπόρρητον ποιησάμενος ταχύ /ῖνα τὰς ἀφύας ὠνοῖντο πολλὰς τοῦ βολοῦ, / τῶν δημιουργῶν ξυλλαβεῖν τὰ τρύβλια.

⁴⁴⁶ Niketas Choniates, *History* 56.25.

⁴⁴⁷ Aristophanes, *Knights* 258–259.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 391–392.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 103–104.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 720.

4.3. John Kamateros: An Iambic Yapper

With a literary portrayal of another official who numbered in the retinue of Manuel Komnenos,⁴⁵¹ Choniates revisits all the above-discussed iambic/comic *τόποι*, which are further enforced by frequent references to drunkenness and excessive speaking habits:⁴⁵²

This Kamateros ... although he had tasted the highest learning only by the tip of his finger and although he was not a strict lover of divine philosophy, nor was he a quick-learner, his speech flew his words streaming like beautifully flowing spring water which is running down the hill, thanks to which he secured a great fame for himself. Being the worst glutton and the mightiest drunkard, he sang to the accompaniment of a small lyre. He moved himself rhythmically to the sound of the cithara and danced *kordax*, swinging his legs to and fro. With his mouth wide open, he was filling himself with wine, he poured into himself seas of it and, like sponges, he frequently soaked it in. He did not plunge his mind into the sea of drunkenness with such irrigation, nor did his mind fail him, just as happens with the drunkards, nor did he throw his head from one side to the other while being flooded with drunkenness. Instead, he would say something wise, and through drinking, he excited and watered his reasoning, and he rather strengthened himself to audacious speaking. Pursuing drinking parties, not only did he please the emperor, but also greatly endeared himself to the rulers of these nations who were devoted to carousing. When he was sent as an envoy to them, he outdid in drinking those, whom it took a long time to be brought back from their drunken stupor and be revived to their senses. He also kept pace with others: these were the men who emptied the entire casks into their stomach, held the amphorae as if they were wine glasses and their after-dinner vessel was as huge as the one used by Herakles.⁴⁵³

One can readily identify several traits characteristic of the insulting speech of iambos which are present in the passage: the inordinate speaking habits, the excessive consumption of alcohol, strengthened by the pervasive reference to an open mouth and the overall insistence on the body explored throughout it. Certainly, the incontinency and effeminacy of

⁴⁵¹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 110.20–115.46.

⁴⁵² Ibid. 113.87. Kamateros' career was discussed by R. GUILLAND, "Les Logothètes: Etudes sur l'histoire administrative de l'Empire byzantine" *REB* 29 (1971) 5–115, at 59–61. D. CHRISTIDIS, *Μαρκιανὰ ἀνέκδοτα*. 1. *Ἀνάχαρσις ἢ Ἀνανίας*, 2. *Ἐπιστολές - Σιγίλλιο*. Thessaloniki 1984, 103–110 argued that John Kamateros is also the protagonist of an anonymous twelfth-century satire *Anacharsis or Ananias*. Christides' stipulation was rejected by A. KAZHDAN's review in *Hellenika* 36 (1985) 184–189 (cf. *ODB* I 83). ROILLOS, *Amphoteroglossia* 250–252 agrees with Christidis and points to several similarities in both portrayals.

⁴⁵³ Niketas Choniates, *History* 113.87–114.10. Ἦν δὲ ὁ Καματηρὸς οὗτος, ἵνα καὶ ἔτι μικρὸν παρακινήσω τῆς ἱστορίας μοι τὸν εἰρμόν, μαθημάτων μὲν ὑψηλοτέρων ἄκρῳ λιχανῶ γεγευμένος καὶ τῆς ὑπερσέμνου φιλοσοφίας οὐκ ἀκριβὴς ἑραστής, οὐδ' εὐμαθὴς ὁπαδός, κράτιστος δὲ τῇ φυᾷ καὶ τῷ ἀμελετήτῳ χαίρων τῆς φράσεως, ῥέων τε τῷ λόγῳ κατὰ πηγὰδα καλλίρειθρον διεκδιδοῦσαν τῶν πρηνῶν, ἐκ τοῦδε κλέος ἀπηνέγκατο μέγιστον. ἀνθρώπων δὲ ὀψοφαγώτατος ὢν καὶ οἰνοφλύγων ὁ κράτιστος πρὸς λύριον ἔψαλλε καὶ πρὸς κιθάραν μετερρυθμίζετο καὶ κόρδακα ὥρχεῖτο καὶ τῷ πόδε πολλὰκις παρενεσάλευε. χανδὸν δὲ τῶν οἴνων ἐμφορούμενος καὶ κατὰ τοὺς θαλαττίους χόας καὶ τὰς σπογγιάς συχνάκις τὸ ποτὸν ἀνιμῶμενος οὐ κατεπόντου τὸν νοῦν τῇ ἀρδείᾳ, μήτε παρασφαλλόμενος ὡς οἱ ἔξοινοι, μήτε τὸ κάρη βάλλων ἐτέρωσε ὡς ὑπὸ μέθης ἐπικλυζόμενος, ἀλλ' ἔλεγέ τι σοφόν, ἀναφλέγων τε καὶ ἄρδων ἐν τῷ πίνειν τὸ λογιζόμενον, καὶ πρὸς βλάστην λόγων μᾶλλον ἐπερρωννύετο. διώκων δὲ τὰ συμπόσια οὐ βασιλεῖ μόνον πλεῖστα κεχάριστο, ἀλλὰ καὶ δυνάσταις μάλα πεφίλητο τῶν ἐθνῶν, ὅποσοι τοὺς κώμους περιεσπούδαζον. κατὰ γὰρ πρεσβείαν αὐτοῖς παραβάλλων τοὺς μὲν ὑπερέβαλεν ἐν τοῖς πότοις καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὀψὲ κατήνεγκε τῆς μέθης ἀνάνηψιν καὶ τοῦ κάρου ἀνάνευσιν, τοῖς δὲ καὶ ἰσοφάρισεν· οὗτοι δὲ ἦσαν, οἳ πιθάκνας ὅλας ἐς τὴν γαστέρα μετήγγιζον καὶ ἀμφορέας ὥχουν τοῖς δακτύλοις ὡς κύλικας καὶ τὸν σκύφον εἶχον ἀεὶ ἐπιδείπνιον τὸν Ἡράκλειον.

Kamateros is underscored not only by the excessive usage of his mouth (eating/speaking), but also by the lascivious movements he performed, hence the κόρδαξ, which was a traditional dance of the Old Comic tradition.⁴⁵⁴

The incontineny of Kamateros is further strengthened by the iambic insistence on the activity of his own mouth. Surely, as Choniates writes, Kamateros rose to prominence thanks to the streams of words (ῥέων τε τῷ λόγῳ) which were emitted by his mouth. But the verbal downpour produced by Kamateros comes down to verbal excess with no meaning and worth whatsoever: he is simply an uneducated yapper who floods others with raging torrents of his words. We have already seen how this motif is explored in Psellos' *In Iacobum*, where Jacob disgorged with sour and unpleasant wine, which stands as a metonym of bad poetry which was composed by an unschooled rustic.⁴⁵⁵

Choniates links Kamateros and his boorish babbling to Aristophanic characters through a series of direct intertextual links. In the opening sections of the *Knights*, two slaves engage in a comic dialogue in order to resolve how to deal with their violent and exacting master, i.e. the Paphlagon. Being at a loss, and not knowing how to act one of the slaves, Demosthenes, proposes to drink more way in order to come up with any idea at all:

Demosthenes: ... but bring me quickly a measure of wine (οἴνου χοῶ) so that I may water my mind and say something fine (τὸν νοῦν ἵν' ἄρδω καὶ λέγω τι δεξιόν).

Nikias: Ah me! How in the world would your drinking aid us?

Demosthenes: Very much indeed! Give it to me, and I shall recline. For when I'm drunk, I shall pour out everywhere tiny counsels, thoughts and arguments (βουλευματίων καὶ γνωμιδίων καὶ νοιδίων).⁴⁵⁶

As I have remarked in the discussion of the portrayal of Jacob in Psellos' *In Iacobum*, in the sympotic and iambic tradition wine and its consumption were regularly associated with the creation of poetic output.⁴⁵⁷ Yet, for Demosthenes, the proposal of drinking more measures of wine is merely an excuse to get drunk: filled with alcohol he will be able to produce only little counsels, thoughts and ideas. On the contrary, Kamateros is portrayed in the passage from Chonites' *History* as such a mighty drunkard that the more he drunk, the wiser he seemed to have been. Indeed, through the excessive drinking, he nourished and agitated his own reasoning. It is no coincidence at all that the phrase which Choniates uses here ἀλλ' ἔλεγέ τι σοφόν, ἀναφλέγων τε καὶ ἄρδων ἐν τῷ πίνειν τὸ λογιζόμενον mirrors the one used by Demosthenes: τὸν νοῦν ἵν' ἄρδω καὶ λέγω τι δεξιόν. Once again, re-using a well-known quotation from Aristophanic play, Choniates links Kamateros' boorish behaviors, drunkenness and excessive talking.

All these spheres are neatly connected by the resort to the already familiar watery images which are, characteristically to the iambic discourse, related to the acts of speaking. Choniates shows how Kamateros "flows with his speech" (ῥέων τε τῷ λόγῳ) with torrents of words. The participle which is used here, ῥέων, might actually point to vomiting: an image

⁴⁵⁴ References to kordax were regularly used by Byzantine authors as a means of satire and invective: J. KODER, "Kordax und Methe: Lasterhaftes Treiben in byzantinischer Zeit" *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 50.2 (2013) 947–958.

⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, such a bombastic loquacity practiced by Kamateros was regarded as a paragon of rusticity (ἀγροικία), which was the polar opposite of the much-desired urbanity (ἀστειότης) of the educated aristocracy, which was visible in "mildness of speech: CUPANE, "Στήλη τῆς ἀστειότητος" 203–204. Again, many oral activities in the iambic discourse are linked to the emotion of disgusts, see CHAPMAN et al., "In Bad Taste."

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid. 95–101.

⁴⁵⁷ *Deipnosophists* X 31.6: οἶνος καὶ φρονέοντας ἐς ἀφροσύνας ἀναβάλλει

which connects speaking and consumption, explored at length in Aristophanic comedies and, again, in Psellos' invectives.⁴⁵⁸ Moreover, as we have seen in the passage, Kamateros absorbs the sea-like measures of wine (κατὰ τοὺς θαλαπτίους χόας), without even flooding his mind with it (οὐ κατεπόντου τὸν νοῦν). Just as was the case with Jacob, Kamateros' drunkenness is simply infinite.

Through such watery images, Choniates appropriates one of the standard ancient comic τόπος, which equated the infinite space of the sea with the alcoholic stupor.⁴⁵⁹ One of the most famous examples of this interrelation is a well-known story of a tavern-house in the city of Akragas (Agrigentum) which was named 'Trireme' after some youngsters in their drunken stupor confused it with a ship. As Athenaeus accounts in the *Deipnosophists*:

Timæus of Tauromenium relates that there was a certain house at Agrigentum called 'The Trireme,' on this account:— Some young men got drunk in it, and got so mad when excited by the wine, as to think that they were sailing in a trireme, and that they were being tossed about on the sea in a violent storm; and so completely did they lose their senses, that they threw all the furniture, and all the sofas and chairs and beds, out of window, as if they were throwing them into the sea, fancying that the captain had ordered them to lighten the ship because of the storm. And the next day, when the prætors came to the house, there were the young men still lying, sea-sick as they said; and, when the magistrates questioned them, they replied that they had been in great danger from a storm, and had consequently been compelled to lighten the ship by throwing all their superfluous cargo into the sea.⁴⁶⁰

Interestingly enough, Choniates does not limit himself to a blind following of a literary motif, he consciously alters it and hyperbolizes Kamateros' drunkenness, unlike the comic drunkards from Akragas, his protagonist is in full command of the boundless seas of drunkenness: the more he drinks, the soberer he is (a trait that would render Psellos' Jacob green with envy).

Furthermore, John's infinite drinking abilities became the point of focus of the emperor Manuel – and are further explored in one more entertaining anecdote, which is brimming with the motifs which we have already encountered in Psellan *In Iacobum*:

... he was bet once by the Emperor Manuel that he could gulp down to the bottom a porphyry wine-vessel (λεκανίδα) filled with water ... well-pleased, Kamateros gave his ear to the gamble. The bowl was filled to the brim (ὑπερχειλῆς) and contained two choes (κεχαδυῖα περὶ χόας δύο); after he had stooped down like an ox (ὁ δὲ κύψας ὡς βοῦς), he emptied the vessel, having paused his continuous drinking only once in order to take some air, and he received the prizes which had been accepted in the wager.⁴⁶¹

In the passage, Choniates again re-uses standard comic/iambic τόποι. As I have stated several times, both a drunkard and a boor are within the arsenal of standard comic characters.⁴⁶² Certainly, here and in many other places throughout the history, drunkenness

⁴⁵⁸ For releasing bodily fluids in Aristophanic comedies see WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef* 245.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. 238 ff., DAVIDSON, *Courtesans* 44–45.

⁴⁶⁰ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* II 5, English translation by H.G. BOHN, *The Deipnosophists. Or Banquet of The Learned of Athenaeus*. London 1854, 61.

⁴⁶¹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 114.15–28: συνέθετό ποτε τῷ βασιλεῖ Μανουὴλ ὕδατος πλησθεῖσαν διεκροφῆσαι τὴν πορφύρεον λεκανίδα ... ὡς δὲ τὸν λόγον ἀσμένως ὁ Καματηρὸς ἠνωτίσατο, ἡ μὲν λεκανὶς ἦν ὑπερχειλῆς ὕδατος, κεχαδυῖα περὶ χόας δύο, ὁ δὲ κύψας ὡς βοῦς τὸ ἄγγος ἐκένωσεν, ἅπαξ ἀνακόψας τὸ συνεχὲς τῆς πόσεως καὶ τότε ὡς τὸ πνεῦμα πλεῖον συλλέξειε, καὶ εἶχεν εὐθύς τὰ ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς βασιλέως ἀποδιδόμενα.

⁴⁶² DAVIDSON, *Courtesans* 155.

is used by Choniates as a fundament of his social critique.⁴⁶³ Kamateros' intoxication, in line with iambic/comic mechanics, stands as metonymy for wasteful and mindless self-indulgence of the ruling classes, a vice which ultimately led to the collapse of the state – even the emperor seems to be more concerned with drunken feats of his boorish tax official, than with the attending to affairs of the state. Furthermore, Choniates operates here with another comic/iambic motif of water-drinking which was thought to be far more laughable than the excessive alcoholic inebriation.⁴⁶⁴

More than that, Choniates consciously explores the comic/iambic τόποι of 'breathless drinking,' which we have already encountered in Psellos' invective against Jacob. The λεκανίς which is the object of the 'drunken' wager between the emperor and Kamateros was so big that even such a skilled drunkard was unable to empty it at once: he had to take in some additional air. In a similar vein, prior to the scene of the wager, Choniates relates how Kamateros managed to endear himself to the foreign monarch by emptying with them enormous amphorae, as large as the ones from which Herakles drunk.⁴⁶⁵

More importantly however, just as was the case with John of Poutza, Choniates focuses the attention of the reader on John's mouth and throat. The yapping maw of John is as covetous in the consumption of food and drink as excessive he is in the production of verbiage: the two spheres are again inextricably linked with each other. For this very reason, John's body seems to be limited to his mouth and throat: he fills himself with his mouth wide open (χανδὸν ἐμφορούμενος), he slurps (διεκροφῆσαι) and pours entire vessels directly to his gut (ὅλας ἐς τὴν γαστέρα μετήγγιζον).

Yet, the iambic imagery does not stop here. Once Kamateros accepts the wager, he holds up the vessel and stoops forward like an ox and consumes two *choes* of beverage.⁴⁶⁶ We have already encountered the phrase ὁ δὲ κύψας ὡς βοῦς in an equally humorous scene of excessive drinking in *In Iacobum* as well as in the previous episode related to John of Poutza. The very act of stooping down, which is signalled by the participle κύψας overtly uses the mechanics of iambic insult, where the body is frequently presented in challenging, unmanly and effeminate positions. The very mention of βοῦς may once again be a pun on John's boorishness and superfluous production of senseless speech. Again, the imagery seems to have been drawn by Choniates from Aristophanic comedies. One of the entries in *Suda* explains the term by referring to a quotation from Aristophanes' *Peace*:

Having stooped forward/bent forward (κεκυφότες καὶ κύψας): Aristophanes says about the Beetle: "how the accursed creature, having bent forward, eats" – and by this he suggests gluttony. And it is clear that it expresses gluttony because chiefly those of men and animals who are bent forward towards their food and cling to it seem to eat greedily and over-eagerly.⁴⁶⁷

Both participles clearly point to the savagery of the incontinent eating of a comic glutton, and they reinforce violent eating habits of John and endow him with animal features. He 'eats like a dog' who greedily devour their fare in a beast-like position.

⁴⁶³ Cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* X 47 on the fragments from Theopompos' critique of tyrant-drunkards.

⁴⁶⁴ For this see Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* II.22

⁴⁶⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 114.10–13.

⁴⁶⁶ Niketas Choniates, *History* 114.25–26.

⁴⁶⁷ *Suda* κ 1276: Κεκυφότες καὶ Κύψας Ἀριστοφάνης περὶ κανθάρου φησὶν ὅτι δὲ κύψας ὁ κατάρματος ἐσθίει. διὰ τοῦ σχήματος τὴν ἀδδηφαγίαν. διὰ τοῦ σχήματος τὴν ἀδδηφαγίαν αὐτοῦ δηλοῖ. καὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν θηρεμάτων οἱ μάλιστα τοῖς ἐδέσμασιν ἐγκεκυφότες καὶ προσκείμενοι δοκοῦσιν ἀπλήστως καὶ περισπουδάζτως ἐσθίειν.

Seen from this perspective, the participle κύψας introduces yet another feature characteristic to the discourse of iambos: transmogrification and animalization of the body. It is also interesting to add that the beetle is a guise of the aforementioned corrupt Athenian politician Cleon, the very Paphlagon of the *Knights*, as one of the slaves reveals at the outset of the *Peace*.⁴⁶⁸ It might have been the case that through the usage of this term, Choniates tried to instill in his readers the idea that Kamateros (and John of Poutza) is no better than the boorish gluttonous politicians from *Knights*.

The sequence of iambic/comic episodes related to Kamateros is finalized by a scene of ravenous consumption of almost an entire field of green beans by Kamateros.⁴⁶⁹

Because he was unable to resist feasting on green beans, he ... devoured their entire fields and attacked them more fiercely than a jackal ... And when he was encamped by the river, he spotted a small field of beans on its other bank ... he crossed the river and he bit off the major part of the field. Yet, he did not hold himself in this way – he packed that which he had not managed to gobble up in bundles and by lifting them on his back, he crossed the river at once. Then, when he had sat on the floor of his tent, he started counting the beans so eagerly, as if he had been fasting and had not eaten anything for a long time.⁴⁷⁰

Of course, Kamateros is endowed with all the vices of comic glutton: like a comic μονοφάγος not only does he consume in loneliness, but also he has to satiate his desire immediately.⁴⁷¹

Just as was the case with the favourite dish of John of Poutza, the beans in the above-quoted passage serve as a multi-layered metonymy which was inspired by the comic material.⁴⁷² Firstly, similarly to the ζωμός, the κυάμοι had a pronounced sexual overtone in the Old Comic tradition. As Henderson noticed, in the Old Comic tradition the beans functioned as a metonym for young female breasts due to their hardness.⁴⁷³ On top of that, the Byzantines were more than aware that the excessive consumption of pulses caused gases, a pun which probably added additional iambic tone to the scene.⁴⁷⁴

Whatever was the case, both beans and bean eating functioned as a regular motif in the plays of Old Comedy. Heracles' appetite for his favorite bean-stew (ἔτνος) portrayed in Aristophanic *Frogs* is a very good illustration of this tradition.⁴⁷⁵ Certainly, the κυάμοι, had important political connotations in the Old Comedy. They were used to cast votes, according

⁴⁶⁸ Aristophanes, *Peace* 43–49.

⁴⁶⁹ For vegetal imagery in Choniates' History see A. KAZHDAN, "El mundo vegetal en la 'Historia' de Niketas Choniates," *Erytheia: Revista de estudios bizantinos y neogriegos* 16 (1995) 63–72. Also see A. R. LITTLEWOOD, "Vegetal and Animal Imagery in the History of Niketas Choniates," in *Theatron. Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, M. Grünbart (ed.), Berlin – New York 2007, 223–258.

⁴⁷⁰ Niketas Choniates, *History* 114.29–115.37: "Ἦττων δὲ ὧν τῆς τῶν χλωρῶν κυάμων ἐστιάσεως ... ὅλας οὖν ἀρούρας κατεδαπάνα καὶ θωὸς ἀκριβέστερον ἐπεξήρχετο. καὶ τότε παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν ἐνσκηνησάμενος, ἐπειδὴ περ εἰς τὴν περαίαν κυάμων θεάσαιτο γήδιον ... τὸ πλεῖον ἀποτραγῶν οὐδ' οὕτως ἀπέσχετο, ἀλλ' ἐς δεσμάς τὸ μὴ κατεδηδομένον ξυνενεγκὼν ἐπὶ νώτου τε ἀράμενος διέβη τε τὸν ποταμὸν αὐτίκα δὴ μάλα καὶ ἐπὶ δαπέδου τῆς σκηνῆς καθιζήσας ἀνελέγετο τοὺς κυάμους ἡδέως, ὥς εἰ νῆστις ἦν ἐπὶ μακρὸν καὶ ἀπόσιτος."

⁴⁷¹ WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef* 67–69.

⁴⁷² GARLAND, "The Rhetoric of Gluttony" 48 identified the χλωροὶ κυάμοι in this passage as reference to *Batrachomyomachia* 124–125. The wording of the passage (ἐνσκηνησάμενος, διαβαίνειν τὸ ποταμόν) has obvious military connotations. Additionally, beans and pulses as a whole were associated with the food of fighters and sportsmen: I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, "Pallikaria of Lentils. The 'Brave Boys' Beans," in: *Flavours and Delights*, 133–137. From this vantage point, the passage seems to have apparent mock-epic overtones.

⁴⁷³ WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef* 149.

⁴⁷⁴ See for instance Dioscurides, *De Materia Medica* II 105.1–7: κύαμος Ἑλληνικὸς πνευματώτικος ... ὁ δὲ χλορὸς κακοστομαχώτερος καὶ φυσωδέτερος.

⁴⁷⁵ Aristophanes, *Knights*, 61 ff.

to which the Athenians chose their officials.⁴⁷⁶ As a result of this, κυαμοτρώξ, was used within the comic tradition to denote a gluttonous politician who merely consumes the votes through which he is elected.⁴⁷⁷

The noun is clearly connected to almost all of the vices characteristic of the iambic boorish speechifiers: uncontrollable greediness, deviant eating habits and rusticity. It is not surprising that the term appears in the *Knights* where it is used as an epithet of Demos, who has recently purchased a violent abuser Paphlagon as his slave. Κυαμτρώξ also links a number of other iambic motifs, as it clearly points to how one uses one's jaws. As we learn from Suda, bean-chewing seems to be a very distant predecessor of gum-chewing – the Athenians chewed beans while performing boring tasks:

Eating beans (Κυάμους τρώγων): [i.e.] serving as a judge. Or otherwise: in order not to fall asleep, for you are a dotard.⁴⁷⁸

The author of the scholion to *Knights* explains that a bean-eater is always hot-tempered and contentious.⁴⁷⁹ These are of utmost importance: surely, malice and grudge are the leitmotifs of Kamateros' presentation in the *History*. Before the episodes which are related to John's gluttony, Choniates offers some glimpses into his character: as we learn, he is skillful in hatching plots against others.⁴⁸⁰ He accuses his rival, Theodore Styppieotes, of being a fraud and a liar and prosecutes him for state treason. Moreover, he relentlessly looks for new way to defame him.⁴⁸¹ In result, Styppieotes' eyes are gouged out, and he is taken away from the political scene.

Therefore, together with unbridled drunkenness, the bean-eating points to the dangerously parasitic nature of Kamateros. All of them operate in line with the corrective function of iambic discourse since they expose the dangerously unsocial nature of John. These are further emphasized by the very fact that Kamateros, just as John of Poutza, shamelessly lives at the expense of others, which is openly alluded to by the use of the verb ἀναλέγω in the passage, which was related to the collection/computation of taxes and ἐστίασις, which primarily denoted state-funded meals.⁴⁸² Thus, seen from this perspective Kamateros can be very well understood as an iambic/comic glutton, an exacting greedy boor, who constantly lives at the expense of the substance of other people.

4.4. The Monstrous Δημοβορία: The Cyclopean Feasts of Andronikos I Komnenos

The two-year tyranny of Andronikos I Komnenos was, without any doubt, one of the bloodiest periods in the entire Byzantine history. The massacre of the Latins who lived in Constantinople, the uncountable murders of state officials, private individuals and even women (an event which had not been witnessed in Constantinople since the reign of Phocas,

⁴⁷⁶ Suda κ 2578.

⁴⁷⁷ Scholia to *Knights* 41g: κυαμοτρώξ: δικαστικός, κυάμους ἐσθίων. κυάμοις δὲ ἐχρῶντο οἱ δικασταὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ καθεύδειν ἢ ἀντὶ ψήφων. ἄλλοι δὲ διὰ τοῦ σ, κυαμοτρώς, ἄλλως: τρεφόμενος ἀπὸ τῶν κυάμων. ἐπεὶ ἀντὶ ψήφων κυάμοις ἐχρῶντο ἐν ταῖς χειροτονίαις τῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

⁴⁷⁸ Suda κ 2577: Κυάμους τρώγων: δικάζων· ἢ ἵνα μὴ κοιμηθῇς· γέρων γὰρ εἶ.

⁴⁷⁹ Scholia to *Knights* 41g.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. 111.43.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. 112.47–48.

⁴⁸² LSJ 110–111, 698.

and which was never to occur again after Andronikos' reign) are only a few examples which illustrate the sheer volume of evil perpetrated by him.⁴⁸³

I have already shown how Choniates developed on the iambic theme of δημοβωρία in his scathing yet humorous criticism of gluttonous and greedy court officials, who appropriated the resources of the state for their own use. With Andronikos the iambic δημοβωρία assumes a different form. Indeed, as Jurewicz noted, the short and gory reign of Andronikos was, as a matter of fact, the very last attempt to reform the affairs of the state, to curb the greedy elites and reform the apparatus of tax collection, an attempt which ultimately failed. The belly-driven δημοβωρία in case of Andronikos was taken quite literally by Choniates: it no longer denotes 'greediness,' but points to murderous people-eating habits of Andronikos.

The emergence of iambic elements in the biography of the tyrant should not surprise us: Choniates consciously fashions the literary person of Andronikos in various guises, among which Odysseus and cyclops Polyphemus play the most important role and both were tightly connected to ancient Greek comic tradition. As a matter of fact, Worman argued that already in Homeric epic tradition both of them possessed all characteristics of hungry iambic speechifier the production of witty abusive talk mixed with foolish and aggressive prattle which comes through their savage jaws, effeminizing behavioral patterns, and presenting them through the lenses of their crude needy body.⁴⁸⁴ Let us see how this iambic imagery functions in the biography of Andronikos.

To be sure, the yapping mouth, the gaping maw and the gnawing jaws stand at the centre of iambic/comic interest and their consumptive habits are always endowed with deeper metonymic/symbolic significance within the discursive scheme of iambos. It is in such a vein that Choniates consistently characterizes Andronikos through his jaws (γνάθοι, γένυς) at times presenting the body of the tyrant as simply reduced to its devouring gaping mouth. The violent character and murderous nature of Andronikos is regularly linked with the language of food and consumption.⁴⁸⁵ Choniates admits openly, that every day on which Andronikos did not feast like an all-consuming monster upon the flesh of someone or, at the very least, heaped some violent abuse on a court official or whomsoever he saw fit for it. It is interesting to observe how the violent cannibalistic consumption goes hand to hand with tyrant's inclination towards violent, abusive talk:

⁴⁸³ The only extended study of the ascent to power and Reign of Andronikos was proposed by O. JUREWICZ, *Andronikos I Komnenos*. Warszawa 1966 (translated into German: *Andronikos I. Komnenos*, Amsterdam 1970). Jurewicz's monograph was criticized by O. KRESTEN, *JÖB* 20 (1971) 328–334. Ch. Diehl, *Figures Byzantines. Deuxième série*. Paris 1908 showed that Andronikos' portrayal in the History reminds of Romanesque heroes. A. VASILIKOPOULOU, "Ανδρόνικος ο Κομνηνός και Οδυσσεύς" *Επετηρίδων Εταιρεία Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 38 (1969/70) 251–59 was the first one to enlist similarities between Andronikos and Odysseus; N. GAUL, "Andronikos Komnenos, Prinz Belthrandos und der Zyklus: Zwei Glossen zu Niketas Choniates' Χρονική Διήγησις" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 96.2 (2011), 623–660 noted that the literary portrayal of Andronikos is built on the pairs of binary opposites (such as Odysseus versus Polyphemos). A similar argument was presented by SAXEY, R. 2009. "The Homeric Metamorphoses of Andronikos I Komnenos" in *Niketas Choniates*, Efthymiadis–Simpson (eds.) 2009, 120–144. A. KALDELLIS, "Paradox, Reversal and the Meaning of History" in *Niketas Choniates*, Efthymiadis–Simpson (eds.) 2009, 75–100 showed that numerous paradoxes in the portrayal of Andronikos were conscious authorial interventions on the part of Chonites. H. MAGOULIAS "Andronikos I Komnenos: A Greek Tragedy" *Byzantina Symmeikta* 21 (2011), 101–136 read Andronikos' imperial biography can be read as a tragedy.

⁴⁸⁴ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 29: "Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* establish vibrant and disturbing interconnections between the mouth (and jaws, belly) as an ingester of food and the mouth (and teeth, tongue) as an expeller of verbiage."

⁴⁸⁵ For cannibalism and iambic aesthetics see: WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 30–35.

He let down the fine and delicate plumb line of his cruelty to the very bottom of his soul; straitening his every action according to its measure, he considered the day wholly lost on which he had not devoured the flesh (έκρεωβόρησε) of some notable or had not put out the lights of the body or had not contentiously upbraided someone (καθήψατο φιλονείκως), frightening him out of his wits with his scowl and Titanic indignation (έπιτιμητικῶ βλέμματι καὶ Τιτανικῶ έμβριμήματι μὴ έξέστησε τοῦ φρονεῖν). He was like some grave pedagogue who often brings the whip down on the children, reproving them whether they deserve it or not, and is irritated by any sound unpleasant to his ears.⁴⁸⁶

Such depictions of Andronikos' violent 'consumptive' habits reemerge in several scenes in Choniates' narrative. Hence, a dissenting general, Andronikos Lapardas, who wished to instigate a revolt against the tyrant, had to flee out fear the wide-yawning jaw (εύρυχανδῆ γένυς) of Andronikos will swallow him one day.⁴⁸⁷ While Lapardas ended up 'only' with his eyes gouged out (and died shortly thereafter), others were not as fortunate. After Lapardas' plans had been revealed, Andronikos began to suspect everyone of plotting against him. Having ordered a bloody execution of the young emperor Alexios II Komnenos he turned to eradication of his courtiers. The Cyclopean feast began with a certain Mamalos, who was served up as desert for the jaws of Andronikos (ταῖς γνάθοις τοῦ Ἀνδρονίκου). Like cyclops Polyphemos, the tyrant is depicted while carefully preparing his cannibalistic banquet:

He seized one man, Mamalos by name, who was one of the secretaries of Alexios, and stored him up as the final meal of his feast (ές θοίνην έταμίευσε πύματον).⁴⁸⁸ Andronikos cut his meat into joints, and covered it up with a lot sauce, so that it might not by any chance be worthy of any other table companion, except from Andronikos himself and so that it would not fall short of the tables of the Erinyes and the banquets of the jealous Telchines, an appendage which no chef had ever dressed for them. Thus, Mamalos was to be sacrificed in the flames in the Hippodrome.⁴⁸⁹

The passage is rich in intertextual links not only to Homeric *Odyssey*, but it also seems to play upon comic tradition. The phrase ές θοίνην έταμίευσε πύματον is a reference on *Odyssey* 2.19–20 and 9.369–370 and its connotations could not have escaped any of Choniates' readers: Andronikos is just another people-eating monster. At the same, just as

⁴⁸⁶ Niketas Choniates, *History* 323.9–18: έπειδήπερ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὥσει καὶ γραμμὴν μονοδιάστατον καὶ μηκιζομένην εἰς τὸ λεπταλέον καὶ ἀπλατές ἐν τῷ έδαφίῳ τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν οἰκείαν καθάπαξ ὠμότητα προὔποθεις καὶ πρὸς ταύτην ἅπαν ἀποστενῶν τὸ πραττόμενον ἀβίωτον ὅλως ἤγητο τὴν ἡμέραν, καθ' ἣν οὐκ έκρεωβόρησέ τινα τῶν ἐν ὑπεροχαῖς ἢ λύχνους οὐκ έσβεσε σώματος ἢ ὅτουδήτινος οὐ καθήψατο φιλονείκως ἢ έπιτιμητικῶ βλέμματι καὶ Τιτανικῶ έμβριμήματι μὴ έξέστησε τοῦ φρονεῖν. παιδαγωγῶ γὰρ έμβριθεῖ έοικῶς θαμὰ τῶν μεираκίων καταφέροντι τὴν σκυτάλην εύκαίρως ἀκαίρως έπέπληττεν έφιστάμενος καὶ πρὸς πᾶσαν ἀκοὴν εκείνῳ ἀνήδυντον παρωξύνετο. I am following here as an exception English translation by MAGOULIAS, *O City of Byzantium* 178.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. 277.48–51.

⁴⁸⁸ See *Odyssey* 2.19–20: Ἀντιφός αἰχμητῆς· τὸν δ' ἄγριος έκτανε Κύκλωψ ἐν σπῆϊ γλαφυρῶ, πύματον δ' ὀπλίσσατο δόρπον and *Odyssey* 9.269–370: Οὔτιν ἐγὼ πύματον έδομαι μετὰ οἷσ' έτάροις, τοὺς δ' ἄλλους πρόσθεν· τὸ δέ τοι ξεινήϊον έσται.

⁴⁸⁹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 310.19–26: μετ' οὐ πολὺ δὲ κάκ τούτων ἀριστίνδην οὐκ ὀλίγους συνειληφῶς τῶν ὤψεων ἀπεστέρησεν. ἓνα δ' ἀπολαβὼν, ὃς ἐν ὑπογραφεῦσι τῷ Ἀλεξίῳ ἠρίθμητο, τοῦπικλὴν Μάμαλος, ές θοίνην έταμίευσε πύματον. οὕτω δ' αὐτὴν έδαίτρευσε καὶ καρυκείας μετέδωκε πλείονος, ὥς ἀξίαν εἶναι μὴ ἄλλον εύτυχῆσειν δαιταλευτὴν ἢ μόνον Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ τραπέζαις Ἑρινύων καὶ Τελχίνων φθονερῶν έστιάσει μὴ ἀπάδειν τὸ παράθεμα καὶ οἷον οὐδέπω τις ὀψοποιὸς μαγγανεύσας αὐτοὺς εἰστιάκε. τὸ δὲ ἦν πυρὶ παραδοθῆναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον κατὰ τὸ ἱππικόν.

Polyphemos in Euripides' *Cyclops*, the tyrant bears striking similarities to the character of a boastful chef well known from Athenian comedy.⁴⁹⁰ Just after Mamalos ends up being murdered and his body is incinerated during a public spectacle in Hippodrome, Andronikos' murderous jaws turned to George Dishypatos, an official who castigated the tyrant for all the crimes perpetrated by him. Indeed, Andronikos was angered up to a point where he ready to give a share of his cannibalistic feast to the families of his victims:

And the fat Dishypatos would have been pierced like a piglet (κατὰ δελφάκιον)⁴⁹¹ and with his skin roasted brought in a chalice like a delicacy before the members of his household and put forward before his wife (I do not know why, perhaps because he was a gobbler [πολυχανδοῦς δὲ δήπουθεν]⁴⁹²), if it hadn't been for the father of George's wife, Leon Monasteriotes who [managed to have] held in check Andronikos' fury...⁴⁹³

What draws attention in this passage is the metonymic usage of vivid culinary terms, all of which stand for Andronikos bloodthirsty passion for murder. Both 'culinary' passages moreover operate with the imagery which is seemingly close to various comic scenes in Aristophanic comedies.⁴⁹⁴ The comic/iambic air is retained by Choniates by presenting Andronikos in the guise of a boastful chef, a character known very well from the Athenian comic plays. Just like the comic μάγειρος, Andronikos seems to be obsessively focused on presenting the elaborate dishes he has prepared, finds enjoyment in participating in hungry, abusive talk and, at times gives the indications of his complete stupidity.

For instance, when Andronikos orders erecting a new building near the church of the Forty Martyrs, he cannot adorn it with any representation of his noble deeds, which are simply non-existent. Instead, he chooses to depict hunting scenes and chariot races. One of the scenes portrays Andronikos who cuts the flesh of either a deer, or a boar with his own hands and roasts it skilfully over fire (Ἀνδρόνικος μιστύλλων αὐτοχειρὶ κρέας ἐλάφειον ἢ κάπρου μονάζοντος καὶ ὀπτῶν περιφραδέως πυρί). This might be a possible allusion to the previous Cyclopean feasts of Andronikos.⁴⁹⁵

Choniates uses the motif of the jaws figuratively to enhance Andronikos' evil nature, and it would be rather hard to imagine that the described scenes actually took place. As Niels Gaul pointed out, discussing the τόπος in the context of Eustathios' *Parekbolai on Odyssey*,

⁴⁹⁰ For this see WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 135–139.

⁴⁹¹ Interestingly enough, the δελφάκιον had strong sexual connotations in the Old Comic tradition and they stood as metonyms for young female vaginas. This was due to the fact the piglets were sacrificial animals who after the sacrificial killing were singed to make them smooth. For this see *Suda* δ 1205. For the discussion of this see HENDERSON, *Maculate Muse* 132; Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae* 237.

⁴⁹² It is hard to determine whom Choniates had in mind here: it might either refer to Andronikos and the historian expresses his astonishment that the tyrant gave up his sumptuous feast to other people, or to George, whom Andronikos chose to serve as a meal because he was fat.

⁴⁹³ Niketas Choniates, *History* 313.15–20: καὶ ἦν ἂν ὁ πιμελώδης Δισύπατος κατὰ δελφάκιον διαπειρόμενος καὶ πυρρακίζων τὴν ἐπιδερμίδα καὶ ὡς ὄψον ἐπὶ κανοῦ τιθέμενος καὶ τοῖς κατ' οἶκον εἰσαγόμενος καὶ τῇ ὁμευνέτιδι προτιθέμενος (οὐκ οἶδα ἐφ' ὅτου, πολυχανδοῦς δὲ δήπουθεν), εἰ μὴ ὁ τῆς γαμετῆς τούτῳ πατὴρ ὁ Μοναστηριώτης Λέων ἀνεσεύραζεν Ἀνδρόνικον τῆς ὀρμῆς.

⁴⁹⁴ I am referring here to the mention of the δελφάκιον which, interestingly enough, had strong sexual connotations in the Old Comic tradition and they stood as metonyms for young female vaginas. This was due to the fact the piglets were sacrificial animals who after the sacrificial killing were singed to make them smooth. For this see *Suda* δ 1205. For the discussion of this see HENDERSON, *Maculate Muse* 132; Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae* 237.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 333.56–57: αὐτὸς Ἀνδρόνικος μιστύλλων αὐτοχειρὶ κρέας ἐλάφειον ἢ κάπρου μονάζοντος καὶ ὀπτῶν περιφραδέως πυρί.

Andronikos' γνάθοι equate him with people-eating Polyphemos from Homer's *Odyssey*.⁴⁹⁶ Overt references to cannibalistic cyclops from the *Odyssey* enhance the impression of unhuman and beastly nature of Andronikos. On top of that, Choniates plays as well with Christian symbolism of the mouth and the jaws. In the biblical tradition, the mouth or the jaws were regularly associated with insatiable appetite of Death/Sheol/Hades: the image which was present in Psellos' *In Iacobum*.⁴⁹⁷ This can be gleaned from *Proverbs* 27:20 where Hades and destruction are represented as insatiable.⁴⁹⁸ The motif of the jaws of insatiable death was, by extension, widely used by the Byzantine authors. It appears not only in one of the *Sermones* of Ephraem the Syrian, but also in Eustathios' *Capture of Thessaloniki*.⁴⁹⁹ Hence, the gaping maw of Andronikos presents him not only in the guise of monstrous cyclopean devourer, but also as an embodiment of Death itself or Satan who in the Biblical texts is portrayed as a voracious, all-eating beast.⁵⁰⁰

Moreover, as Worman underlined, the discursive scheme of iambic insult "repeatedly matches violent or devious talk with savage ingestion," an interconnection which is evidently present in Choniates' portrayal of Andronikos.⁵⁰¹ Certainly, the blasphemous outspokenness distances Andronikos from all socially accepted norms, from his social and political role of emperor and render him as an utterly sinful person.⁵⁰² For there is nothing that Andronikos deems holy. When he engages in a sexual intercourse with Eudokia, being notorious for his outspokenness,⁵⁰³ he finds a comfortable excuse for his actions: Manuel is having adulterous relationship with his brother's daughter, whereas in Andronikos' case it is only cousin's young girl.⁵⁰⁴ Andronikos is fond of reviling (φιλολοιδορος) especially those who had deformed bodies or were guilty of wrongdoings, hence derides mocks Kilij-Aslan as a Limping-Aslan (Κουτζασθλάν).⁵⁰⁵ When the patriarch Euthymios Malakes engages in theological dispute with John Kinnamos, Andronikos makes them cease the idle talk, or else he threatens that will

⁴⁹⁶ GAUL, "Andronikos Komnenos" 650–651; EUSTATHIOS, *Parekbolai on Homer's Odyssey*, 343.1–5. While this cannot be doubted, in the *Odyssey* γνάθοι are more generally associated with cannibalistic behaviour or violent consumption, for this see HOMER, *Odyssey* 20.347–48; 18.28–29.

⁴⁹⁷ L. JAMES–A. EASTMOND. "Eat, Drink and pay the price" in: *Eat, Drink and Be Merry* 175–190, at: 179–180. The image of the entrance to Hell became a widely-used iconographic motif in Medieval art both in the western and eastern Europe, see G. D. SCHMIDT. *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century*. London 1995.

⁴⁹⁸ *Proverbs* 27.20: ἄδης καὶ ἀπώλεια οὐκ ἐμπίμπλονται. Cf. *Habakuk* 2:15.

⁴⁹⁹ Ephraem the Syrian, *Sermo in pretiosam et vivificam crucem*, 135.4–6. Eustathios, *Capture of Thessaloniki*, 129.20–22: καὶ οἱ μὲν θανάτῳ κατεσπάρσθημεν, οἱ δὲ, τοῦ Ἰδίου στόμα συγκλείσαντος οἷς, οἶμαι, κεκόρεστο, ἡμῖν ἡμεῖς ἐμείναμεν; see also 112.27. For the association of death with devouring and swallowing in the *History*, see Niketas Choniates, *History*, 70.25–27; 80.42.

⁵⁰⁰ P. KARLIN-HAYTER, "Le Portrait d'Andronic I Comnene et les Oracula Leonis Sapientis", *Byzantinische Forschungen* XII (1987), 103–16 argued that the statue of Andronikos who was supposedly wielding a sickle which was erected in Constantinople presented Andronikos as a Grim Reaper. While it seems to be tempting to follow this line, it does not seem possible: for one, in Greek folklore Death takes life by means of a sword, not a sickle or scythe, as KAZDAN–EPSTEIN, *Change* 27 noted "The scythe was not in use in Byzantium, and the image of Death with its scythe in hand, so popular in the West, would have left the Byzantines unmoved. For the analysis of Andronikos' statue see M. GRÜNBART, "Die Macht der Historiographen – Andronikos Komnenos und sein Bild." *Zbornik Radova Vizantinoloskog Instituta* 48 (2011), 77–87.

⁵⁰¹ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 28.

⁵⁰² HULTIN, *The Ethics of Obscene Speech* discussed λοιδορία and its sinful connotations in the bible.

⁵⁰³ Which was, in fact, one of the reasons for his incarceration: Niketas Choniates, *History*, 139.3: οὐδὲν δὲ ἥττον τὸ ἐλευθεροστομεῖν αἰεὶ.

⁵⁰⁴ Niketas Choniates, *History*, 104.85–6: εἴπερ ὁ μὲν ἀδελφοῦ θυγατρὶ συνουσίαζεν, ὁ δ' Ἀνδρόνικος ἐξαδέλφου παιδὶ συγκατέκειτο.

⁵⁰⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 122.43–54.

throw both men into the river. Just like other manipulative babblers in the iambic/comic tradition, Andronikos is notorious for his constant lies, deceit and cunning. He constantly chatters and deceives in order to achieve his tyrannical aims.⁵⁰⁶

For instance, in one of the episodes Andronikos tries to cheat the Patriarch Theodosios Boraidotes in order to secure his support.⁵⁰⁷ In the first episode Andronikos approaches the patriarch and, clad in foreign clothes, prostrates in front of Theodosios, praising him as the savior of emperor Alexios II. However, the patriarch immediately recognizes Andronikos' nature:⁵⁰⁸

Then, for the first time Theodosios saw the real nature of Andronikos: for he discerned his malicious Gorgon's gaze, his insidious mind, his sophistic and meddlesome character, his stature that was no higher than ten feet, his pompous manner of walking, the disdainful leer which he emitted from beneath his eyebrows, his mind that was always anxious, and the fact that he deemed unhappy those foolish men who accepted him as a friend, all to their own ruin.⁵⁰⁹

Earlier on, visiting Manuel I Komnenos' tomb, Andronikos, having gotten rid of all witnesses, angrily addresses the deceased arch-enemy:

... though he was moving his lips, there was no sound which reached the ears of those who were present, and he made some discourse (διάλεξιν) in secret. It was concluded by the majority that he was singing [some] barbaric hymn. But there were some who were saying that Andronikos mocked (ἐπικερτομεῖν) the Emperor Manuel and simply (ἄτεχνῶς) trampled upon the lying [corpse]: "I have had you as my pursuer for so long, you have been the cause of many of my wanderings, and because of you I have become the target of almost every gossip all over the world. But now that this tomb-stone with seven tips contains you, and the unavoidable sleep from which you shall not wake before the last trumpet is sounded, I shall pursue your family just like a lion that is coming up against a large prey, and I shall exact violent justice [on them] in retribution for the sufferings you inflicted upon me, once I have arrived at the famous seven-hilled city."⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ The deceitful nature and manipulative speech are connected to Andronikos' Odyssean μήτις, hence deceit, cunning, ploys, tricks and skillfulness. As Detienne and Vernant showed in his study, those who are characterized by μήτις bear "a complex of appearances", are always inconstant, changing and adapting to fluid situations which combine opposite forces and features. For this see M. DETIENNE– J.-P VERNANT, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, (trans. J. Lloyd). Sussex–Atlantic Highlands 1978, *passim*.

⁵⁰⁷ Choniates builds here on the episode which is described by Eustathios, *Capture of Thessaloniki*, 38.18–40.7, though extends it significantly and includes the motifs of Tyrants λοιδορία and bestiality.

⁵⁰⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 252.81–253.86; 253.89–90.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. 252.25–253.3: ὁ δὲ τότε πρώτως Ἀνδρόνικον θεασάμενος, ἐπεὶ κατηθρήκει περιεργότερον βλέμμα γοργόν, ὑποκαθήμενον φρόνημα, σοφιστικὸν καὶ περίεργον ἦθος, ἡλικίας ἀναδρομὴν ἐς πόδα δέκατον μικροῦ ἀνατείνουσιν, ἀγέρωχον βάδισμα, ὄφρυν ἐπιλλώπτουσιν ὑπεροψίαν, φροντιστικὸν τε καὶ ἐπὶ συννοίας αἰεὶ ἄνθρωπον, ταλανίσας τοὺς ἀφρόνως ἄνδρα τοιοῦτον εἰσοικισαμένους ἐπ' ἀνηκέστοις ἑαυτῶν συμφοραῖς.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 256.45–257.71: τὰ χεῖλη μὲν κινῶν, φωνὴν δ' οὐδαμῶς ἐξικνουμένην εἰς ὧτα τῶν συνεστώτων οὐ μενοῦν ἀφιεῖς διάλεξιν τινα λαθραίαν ἐπεποίητο. τοῖς μὲν οὖν πλείστοις ἐπώδῃ τις βαρβαρικὴ λελόγιστο τὰ ὑποψαλλόμενα· ἦσαν δ' οἱ, καὶ τούτων μάλιστα οἱ τὴν εὐτραπeliάν μεταδιώκοντες, ἐπικερτομεῖν Ἀνδρόνικον ἔφασκον τῷ βασιλεῖ Μανουὴλ καὶ ἀτεχνῶς κειμένῳ ἐπεμβαίνοντα λέγειν „ἔχω σε τὸν διώκτην καὶ πολλὰς ἐμοὶ πλάνας προυξηνηκότα καὶ ὑφ' οὗ παγκόσμιον μικροῦ γεγένημαι περιάλλημα ... καὶ σὲ μὲν ὁ ἐπτακόρυμβος οὐτοσί συνέξει λίθος ὅσα καὶ ἄφυκτον δεσμοπτήριον νήγρετον καθεύδοντα ὕπνον καὶ τῆς τελευταίας σάλπιγγος ἐπιδεῖ· ἐγὼ δὲ τὸ σὸν μετελεύσομαι γένος οἷα καὶ λέων μεγάλῳ ἐπεγκύρσας θηράματι καὶ δίκας ὧν ὑπὸ σοῦ κακῶς ἐπεπόνθειν γενναίας εἰσπράξομαι, τὴν ἐπτάλοφον ταυτηνὴ καὶ λαμπρὰν εἰσιῶν μεγαλόπολιν.

This particular liking of Andronikos towards λαιδορία is reflected by his immediate surroundings: the barbaric yappers who barely knew Greek and the aggressive dog, who watched over the entrance to his quarter (ὁ δὲ γε κύων πρὸς ταῖς θύραις ἐδέδετο) which was armed with saw-like teeth (κάρχαρος) who barked loudly through the nights whenever they saw anyone.⁵¹¹ The connection of dog and the iambic motif of aggressive verbal/consumptive behavioral patterns should not be overlooked. Indeed, one of the standard invectives in what Worman labelled as an ‘hungry talk’ in the *Iliad* is to call someone a ‘dog’. It is a degrading epithet which points both to cannibalistic eating and a mouth which is prone to ferocious abuse.⁵¹² Such a connection can be also easily gleaned from the literary tradition which surrounded Diogenes the Cynic, famous both for his outspokenness and violent talk. In addition, in the Greek tradition dogs were frequently linked with what was thought to be ‘feminine’ hence lack of self-control and succumbing to all impulses (lack of ἐγκρατεία), lack of obedience and complete lack of σοφροσύνη, hence stupidity.⁵¹³ Last but not least, such an interconnection of the species of dogs and the feminine can be seen in the feminine designation of the noun: it could both take the masculine and feminine article, hence ὁ κύων or ἡ κύων are both possible.⁵¹⁴

Such an ‘iambic’ characterization of Andronikos through his voracious γνάθοι points to his (at times) predominantly feminine nature. This linkage of ‘feminine’ urges and violent speech of the tyrant is nowhere clearer than in the passage, where Andronikos tries to berate the Latins who attack Thessaloniki, but the jaw-related verbs which he uses in them make him the laughing-stock of the citizens of the city:

Then Andronikos wrote letters to David, who chanced to govern Thessaloniki then, and commanded him to keep a watchful eye while defending the city and not to be scared that the ‘Latin sandal-stitchers’⁵¹⁵ leap over, bite and prick [each other] (πεδιλορράφους Λατίνους, πηδᾶν δὲ καὶ δάκνειν καὶ κεντεῖν) using Andronikos’ own words. And due to the fact that Andronikos composed the letters in this vein, it was only Andronikos who knew what he meant since he produced them, but what was written in them stirred laughter in the citizens

⁵¹¹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 322.48–52: ὁ δὲ γε κύων πρὸς ταῖς θύραις ἐδέδετο, χαλκεόφω- νος ὦν καὶ πρὸς βραχεῖαν διαταραπτόμενος ψόφησιν καὶ γινόμενος ὑλακόμωρος. Choniates frequently associates Andronikos with dog and dog-like behaviours: for instance, the patriarch Theodosios Boraidotes berates Andronikos for his dog-like fawning (253.89–91: κυνηδὸν προσκνυζόμενος), while during the siege of Nikaia, Andronikos is portrayed as ‘hungering like a dog’ (283.23: λιμώττων δὲ ὡς κύων).

⁵¹² For this see WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 30–33. Also see G. NAGY, *The Best of the Achaeans*. Baltimore–London 226–227 who associates dog-like imagery/invectives with the discourse of blame. The dogs and the ideas which surrounded the animal have been thoroughly analysed by C. FRANCO, *Shameless. The Canine and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*. Oakland 2014, esp. 7–37 and 54–74, otherwise *passim*. Outside of iambic tradition, the perception of the dogs was positive: for a general outline of the dogs in Byzantine social reality see A. RHOBY, “Hunde–Präsenz und Spezielle Aufgaben in Byzanz,” in “Lebenswelten zwischen Archäologie und Geschichte – Festschrift für Falko Daim” Drauschke J. et al. (eds.). Mainz 2018, 811–820. For classical tradition also see C. A. GIBSON, ‘In Praise of Dogs: An Encomium Theme from Classical Greece to Renaissance Italy’, in *Our Dogs, Our Selves Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society*, L. D. Gelfand (ed.). Turnhout 2017, 19–40.

⁵¹³ FRANCO, *Shameless* 121–154; for this see also Plutarch, *On the Intelligence of Animals* 13.

⁵¹⁴ FRANCO, *Shameless* 148–154.

⁵¹⁵ Probably a better translation would be ‘Latin fairies,’ since Andronikos clearly to mocks Latin as pathics. Choniates actually makes a pun on a term used by Eustathios, *Capture of Thessalonike* 82.17–18: πεδίλων ῥαφέας (sandal stitchers). As a matter of fact, Eustathios links sandals (which apparently were the latest craze of fashion in the Empire: πεδίλων νεωτερικῶν) with the luxurious, barbaric and effeminate clothes worn by the inept governor of Thessaloniki (82.5–23).

of the city who were fond of scoffing, for they changed the terms into shameful and vulgar words, which one should not cite.⁵¹⁶

All three words which Choniates cites, hence *πηδᾶν*, *δάκνειν* and *κεντεῖν* are used often in Aristophanic comedies and in iambic tradition as metonyms for sexually charged behaviours.⁵¹⁷ All of them point as well to Andronikos' unbridled sexual lust and his effeminacy. Just as shameless violent-jawed dogs, tyrant's gender seems to be fluid and constantly wavers between masculine and feminine.⁵¹⁸ The effeminacy of Andronikos manifests vividly in his uncontrolled sexual lust: rescuing his wife, Theodora from prison in Constantinople, he enjoys a quick coitus with her before they even think of leaving the place. During the exile during the exile in the court of Saltuq he conceives with her two of their offspring: another son, Alexios and a daughter Irene.⁵¹⁹ During the siege of Antioch, Andronikos succumbs to wantonness (*τρυφαῖς*):⁵²⁰ clad in effeminate clothes, he is parading though the city attended by effeminate male bodyguards and constantly seeking after his lover:

As a result, his masculinity was lost (*ἐκεχάλαστο*), and he was constantly battling with thoughts; the savage beast [in him] abated his gravity of deportment and rational reasoning (*τὸ φροντιστικόν*) and erased his austerity.⁵²¹

Similar happening occurs just after Thessaloniki fell to the Latins. Choniates explicitly attacks the tyrant for not having been manly enough (*οὐκ ἦν ἀρρενούμενος*) to repel the foreign troops from the city.⁵²² Then once again Choniates elaborates on Andronikos' effeminacy: he engages in Dionysiac orgies, with Thyades, Sobades Maenads and Bacchants. Suffering from lechery (*λαγνεία*), Choniates continues, Andronikos wished to imitate the sexual prowess of Heracles or even to be like an octopus, which was thought to be the most incontinent animal of all, as Aelian attests:

They say that octopus is the most incontinent of fish and copulates until all the strength of its body is drained away, leaving it weak, incapable of swimming, and unable to seek for food; in consequence of which it provides food for others, thus: small fishes, and what are known as hermit-crabs,' and crabs come

⁵¹⁶ Niketas Choniates, *History* 317.14–318.21: ἔπειτα δὲ τῷ διέπειν λαχόντι Θεσσαλονίκην Δαυὶδ ἐπέστελλε καὶ ἐπέτελλεν ἐπαγρυπνεῖν τῇ τῆς πόλεως φυλακῇ καὶ μὴ δεδιέναι τοὺς πεδιλορράφους Λατίνους, *πηδᾶν* δὲ καὶ *δάκνειν* καὶ *κεντεῖν*, ἵν' αὐτὰς τὰς Ἀνδρονίκου παραθήσονται λέξεις. καὶ ἐφ' ὅτῳ μὲν Ἀνδρόνικος οὕτως συντεῖται τὰ γραμμάτια, μόνος ὁ ἐκδιδοὺς ἐπιστάμενος ἦν Ἀνδρόνικος• αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς φιλοσκώμμοσι πολίταις διὰ γέλωτος ἤγετο τὰ γραφόμενα, ἀντιφέρουσι ταῦτα καὶ ἀντιβάλλουσι πρὸς αἰσχρὰ τινα δημόσια ῥήματα, ἃ μὴ προφέρειν χρεών.

⁵¹⁷ Guzzling, *ροφεῖν* see Aristophanes, *Knights* 51, 905; *Pax* 716, *Wasps* 814, 906; bruise with teeth, *φλάω* *Peace* 1306, *Plutus* 784; bite off, *τρώγω*: *Peace* 1328, *Acharnians* 801, 803, 806; *Knights* 1077, *Lysistrata* 537; swallow, *καταβροχθίζει*: *Knights* 826, 357; grinding with the jaws (*σμώνω γνάθοις*): *Peace* 1308–1309. For the discussion of these and other terms see WILKINS, *The Boastful Chef* 25.

⁵¹⁸ Elsewhere, I have discussed this aspect of Andronikos' portrayal in *History* at more length in LABUK, "Andronikos I Komnenos" 271–272; Also see KALDELLIS, *Paradox* 85–86

⁵¹⁹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 142.28–30.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.* 138.28–140.81.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.* 139.53–55: οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν βλοσυρὸν ἐκεχάλαστο καὶ τὸ ἐπὶ συννοίας εἶναι ἀεὶ καὶ τὸ τοῦ ἥθους ἐμβριθεῖς καὶ φροντιστικὸν ἐνδεδώκει καὶ τὸ ἐπισκύνιον ὁ θῆρ ἀπεβάλετο.

⁵²² *Ibid.* 321.12–13: οὐκ ἦν ἀρρενούμενος καὶ πᾶσαν μηχανὴν μετιών, ὅπως ἀποσοβήσῃ τὸ ἀλλόγλωττον.

about it and devour it ... And as to the female, it is soon exhausted by giving birth so frequently.⁵²³

In this madness for sexual intercourse (φιλότητι μαργαίνων), however, Andronikos is unable to imitate neither Heracles, nor octopus and to restore his sexual powers, he consumes exotic aphrodisiacs (some species of Nilotic animal) and rubs special ointments into his genitals.⁵²⁴ Once he returns from his bacchanalia he shamelessly mocks the stupidity of his subjects in Constantinople: suspending the horns of the deer in the agora under the pretense of showing his hunting prey, he in fact derides the wives of the citizens whom he deemed guilty of adultery.⁵²⁵

Surely, through such imagery Choniates underscores times and times again ungodly and sinful nature of Andronikos, who is guilty of every conceivable carnal sin. Within the scheme of *iambos* the body is not only transformed, but also its outflows and physical reactions are frequently explored in order to highlight those sets of behaviours which are threatening to the status quo. It is for this reason that Choniates resorts to iambic motif of defecation and presents Andronikos in several scatological episodes.

Just before his coronation, Andronikos purportedly organizes a pagan-like festival, which includes some ungodly dances, jumping, clapping and singing in pitch voices.⁵²⁶ This serves as a prelude to a scatological episode which occurs during the ceremonial procession, during which Andronikos is assisted by many shield-bearers (πλείστων ὑπασπιστῶν). First, Andronikos receives the holy communion in the church, and swears on the Wondrous Mysteries that the only reason why he took the crown was a wish to assist Alexios. The pace of the coronation procession that follows, is extraordinarily fast. According to the opinion of some men, the old tyrant was unable to restrain his bowels and defecated his breeches (μὴ στέγειν ἔχον ἐπὶ πολὺ τὰ λύματα τῆς γαστροῦς). It is hard to escape an impression that Choniates might be pointing to the episode of Arius' death. There are several similarities between them: both Arius in *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Andronikos in *History* are paraded through the city by many soldiers, both episodes include a fast-paced, official processions and both focus on strange sensations within bowels which disrupt the official occasion. Hence, it does not seem unlikely that, similarly to Psellos' invectives, the iambic motif of an outflowing, uncontained body was endowed with additional Christian overtones by Choniates.

Associating Andronikos with filth rounds up the exploration of iambic δημοβορία. We have seen how Choniates skillfully operates here with iambic imagery which focuses chiefly on the mouth/jaws/maw which becomes a multi-layered metonymy for ungodly behavioral patterns, detrimental to the state and which were unworthy of an emperor. Indeed, the violent, lewd and cannibalistic jaws of Andronikos became the paragon of everything that Byzantine emperor should not be: an unscrupulous murderer, an abusive yapper, a lecherous suitor and a sinful apostate. Let us now see how such iambic imagery were employed by Choniates in further literary portrayals of the imperial officials under the Angeloi.

⁵²³ Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals*, VI.28. English translation in A.F. SCHOLFIELD, *Aelian. On the Characteristics of Animals*, vol. II. London 1959, 47.

⁵²⁴ Niketas Choniates, *History* 321.20–322.41.

⁵²⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 322.53–59.

⁵²⁶ Ibid. 270.27–271.42. For other instances of such overtly pagan festivities see e.g. Ibid. 339.20–340.38.

4.5. Constantinople as a Second Sybaris Under the Angeloi: The Passive, Consumptive and Dissolving Body

With the ascent of the Angeloi family, which commenced after the short, yet bloody tyranny of Andronikos, the Empire was already in the slippery slope which inevitably led to the catastrophe of 1204. The sequence of intellectually and politically inept emperors was marked by the internal strife, external threats posed both by the Latins and the Turks and complete lack of imperial foresight. If we are to believe Choniates (as Smyrlis argued, there are no viable reasons for doubting it)⁵²⁷ the Angeloi emperors have managed to change Constantinople into a second Sybaris: instead of attending to the political, social and military matters of the state, they preferred to indulge in every kind of luxury and bodily excess.⁵²⁸

By introducing the theme of Sybaris, Choniates again explicitly refers to the comic tradition, preserved in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*. Indeed, in ancient Greek literature Sybaris functioned as a paragon of superfluous luxury, gluttony and drunkenness. Athenaeus reports for instance that even the children wore expensive purple gold-embroidered robes and extravagant hair styles. The Sybarites purportedly bred little dwarves at their houses for their own amusement as well as Maltese puppies, which were accompanying them even when they went to their gymnasia. If these were not enough, even the cavalry had saffron-dyed robes over their breastplates, the roads which were leading to the city were covered with awnings (which protected from the scorching sun and rain), while the cisterns filled with wine which were located on the seaside provided the city with continuous influx of wine, which flew into the city through the canals. The inhabitants of the city spent their life in drunken carousals and did not even leave their city.⁵²⁹

For Choniates, such a Sybaritic way of living functions as an explanation for the failure of the Empire during the military conflict with the Vlachs and the Cumans who were attacking important cities in Asia Minor. Leaving the administration of the empire to a worthless and exacting official, Theodore Kastamonites, Isaakios II Angelos:

... every day lived in the lap of luxury and furnished a Sybaritic table, tasting the most pleasant sauces, piling up [the mountains] of bread, and offering a lair of game, a throng of fish and an ocean of deep-red wine. Then, on alternate days he enjoyed himself with baths he smelled of prepared unguents and perfumes and sprinkled himself with the oils of myrrh. With his curly hair, he surpassed *the likeness of the pillars of temple*.⁵³⁰ He was fond of showing himself off and loved ornaments just like a peacock, [so that] he never wore the same clothes twice and every day he left the palace chambers *like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber*,⁵³¹ or like *the sun, leaving the lovely lake of Ocean*⁵³²⁵³³

⁵²⁷ K. SMYRLIS, "Sybaris on the Bosphoros: Luxury, Corruption and the Byzantine State under the Angeloi (1185–1203)," in: *Byzantium, 1180-1204: "The Sad Quarter of a Century"?* A. Simpson (ed.). Athens 2015: 159–178. For the Angeloi emperors' enjoyments in their villas situated in Propontis see SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates* 147, 188–189.

⁵²⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 441 and 541.

⁵²⁹ See for instance *Suda* s 1271. Athenaeus *Deipnosophists* XII.15–26.

⁵³⁰ *Psalms* 143.12. English: NIV.

⁵³¹ *Psalms* 18:6. English: NIV.

⁵³² *Odyssey* 3.1. I'm following the translation by W. SHEWRING, *Homer. The Odyssey*. New York 1980, 23.

⁵³³ Niketas Choniates, *History* 441.9–17: ... ἐτύφα καθ' ἡμέραν λαμπρῶς παρατιθέμενος τράπεζαν Συβαρίτιδα καὶ τῶν ἡδυτάτων χυμῶν γεύόμενος βουνίζων τε τοὺς ἄρτους καὶ λόχμην κνωδάλων ἰχθύων τε διάπλευσιν καὶ πόντον οἶνοπα δεικνύς τὴν ἐστίασιν. ναὶ μὴν ἑτερημέροις ἐνευπάθει λουτροῖς ὡσφραίνεται τε μυρεψουμένων

All of the motifs which appear in the passage are already familiar to us: the consumption of extravagant sauces, which was an emblem of a comic ὀψόφαγος, the overabundance (διάπλευσις) of luxurious fish, sequestering of the bread which the Roman Emperors were supposed to distribute to their people for free, and the comic/sympotic imagery of the sea which in the comic and sympotic tradition was a standard metonym of an infinite excess and extreme drunkenness. It should not come as surprise that the excessive consumption goes hand to hand with effeminizing patterns of behavior. As I have argued in the chapter one, within the circle of Greek tradition, living by the needs of one's γαστήρ meant succumbing one's 'masculine' rationality to lowly 'feminine' appetites. For this very reason Isaakios is portrayed in the guise of an effeminate type, who devotes too much attention to his attire, bathing and using extravagant amounts of perfume.⁵³⁴

It is also interesting to note how Choniates mingles comic tradition with overt biblical overtones, which endow additional force to the imagery. Hence, for instance the phrase 'after the similitude of the pillars of temple' is drawn from *Psalms* 143, where the psalmist refers to the daughters of the Israelites, who shall flourish after the deliverance by God from danger. By linking Isaakios to this phrase, Choniates emphasizes utter unmanliness of the emperor and adds additional comic flavour to the passage.⁵³⁵ Quite similarly, the phrase 'like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber' (ὥσπερ ἐκ παστοῦ νυμφίος) refers directly to the *Psalms* 19 and the historian ironically subverts the original meaning of these lines. Unlike the biblical bridegroom, who leaves his chamber to conquer the world, and scatter darkness, Isaakios proceeds to take delight in Sybaritic drunken revels:

Because he delighted in buffoonery, the songs of the lascivious Muse and linked himself with the laughter-stirring dwarf and did not close the palace to the dwarves, the mimes, [all kinds of] parasites and minstrels. These were coupled with the drunken revels and sexual wantonness and everything which destroys a healthy state.⁵³⁶

Prone to living in the lap of luxury and unwilling to concentrate on the serious matters of the empire, Isaakios surrounded himself with the officials who mirrored the aberrant comportment of their emperor. Choniates offers vivid literary portrayals of two of them, Theodore Kastamonites and Constantine Mesopotamites, in which he once again explores the comic/iambic motifs and aesthetics.

It is Theodore, the λογοθέτης τῶν σεκρετῶν, whom Isaakios divests the entire imperial power, while attending to his Sybaritic feasts. Choniates' attitude towards him is negative from the very beginning: he characterizes Kastamonites as a man who was extremely skillful in wielding power (περὶ πραγμάτων ἐγχείρισιν), especially in exacting the public taxes (περὶ τὰς δημοσίας συνεισφοορὰς δεξιότατος) and skilled in crafty speeches (λόγων σοφωτέρων

εὐωδιῶν καὶ ταῖς στακταῖς ἔρραντίζετο, ὡς ὁμοίωμά τε ναοῦ στολαῖς ἐξάλλοις ἐκέκαστο βοστρυχιζόμενος. ἐπιδεικτικός τε ἦν ὡς ταῶς ὁ φιλόκοσμος καὶ μὴ δις τὸν αὐτὸν χιτῶνα ἐνδιδυσκόμενος ἢ ὥσπερ ἐκ παστοῦ νυμφίος καὶ ὡς ἐκ λίμνης περικαλλοῦς ἥλιος προῖων καθ' ἐκάστην τῶν ἀνακτόρων.

⁵³⁴ These are standard motifs of Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*, for these see F. H. TINNEFELD, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates*. München 1971. Cf. Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.64.

⁵³⁵ The mechanism of what Choniates achieves here is in line with Hermogenes' theory of the comic which I have mentioned in the previous chapter.

⁵³⁶ Niketas Choniates, *History* 442.16–21: Χαίρων δὲ ταῖς εὐτραπείαις καὶ τοῖς ἐκ τῆς ἀπαλῆς Μούσης ἄσματος ἀλισκόμενος ἐγερσιγέλωσί τε ἀνθρωπίσκοις συμπαραφύρων οὐκ ἐπεζύγου κέρκωψί τε καὶ μίμοις καὶ παρασίτοις καὶ αἰδοῖς τὰ βασίλεια. τοῖς δὲ τοιούτοις ὁ πάροις κῶμος συνέζευκται πάντως καὶ ἡ κατὰ τὰς κοίτας ἀσέλγεια συνεφέπεται καὶ ὅσα χρηστῆς καὶ ὑγιοῦς βασιλείας συνδιαφθείρει κατάστασιν.

μέτοχος). One cannot escape comparing him to John of Poutza: essentially all the traits of John are shared by Theodore, the uncontrolled drive to power, greediness and covetousness. That Theodore is characterized as a crafty speechifier should not come as any surprise: mouth and its speaking habits come at the very centre of iambic insult. Indeed, the iambic discourse of the Old Comic tradition, Platonic dialogues or Theophrastus' *Characters* is filled with crafty babblers, who are characterized through their excessive and aggressive verbal and consumptive behaviours. Within the tradition of iambos, one always mirrors the other: how one talks is always reflected in how and what one eats.⁵³⁷

Unlike the other portraits of two Johns, in the case of Kastamonites Choniates did not include any humorous scenes of consumption: but the comic air and iambic τόποι are surely present here as well. Theodore, just as other gluttons, suffered from arthritis, and quite similarly to Constantine IX Monomachos from Psellos' *Chronographia*, he was unable to walk and had to be carried through:

Kastamonites, who suffered a disease in the joints of his legs, was often carried in to the emperor on a folding chair by two bearers who were like the handles of amphorae of wine; after discussing useful topics with the emperor or, rather, exploiting the state of Roman affairs, of which he rendered a brief account, he was carried out again.⁵³⁸

Several points deserve attention in this passage. I have already discussed how Jacob's body was, in line with the literary mechanics of *iambos*, transformed by Psellos into a pithos and a wineskin which was leaking with unpleasantly tasting wine. Similar aesthetics are applied here by Choniates, who plays with Theodore's glutton body, which appeared to be more like an αμφορεύς than to a human σῶμα. The interconnection of food consumption and taxes, a τόπος so persistently present not only in the iambic tradition, is also clearly identifiable here: it is explicitly pointed to by Theodore's overeaten body and by the participle καπηλεύων. Indeed, instead of focusing on what is useful, he literally treated the affairs of the Roman polity in the manner of a tavern or a shopkeeper (καπηλεύων τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα). Again, the motif is already familiar, and I have already shown how in the comic/iambic literary tradition the taverns were linked with the underworld, the social lower strata and the prostitutes. Surely, several entries in the *Suda* which revolve around the taverns, fall back on Aristophanic scholia and the fragments drawn from the Old Comic writers, when elaborating on the terms related to καπηλεῖον:

Καπηλικῶς: instead of knavishly. Because the tavern-keepers doctor wine, mixing it fresh with mallow: "The tavern-keepers adulterate wine."⁵³⁹

And:

Κάπηλος: a huckster, a salesman. "A seller of shields." [Or else:] he who hucksters all things.⁵⁴⁰

Or in the following entry:

⁵³⁷ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths*, passim.

⁵³⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 438.3–7: αἱ συνομιλῶν βασιλεῖ τὰ πρόσφορα, ἢ μᾶλλον καπηλεύων τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα καὶ ὀλίγου ἀποδιδούς, αὐθις ἐξήγετο. οἱ δέ γε λαοὶ καὶ τὸ τῆς πολιτείας γερούσιον καὶ ὅσοι τῷ βασιλεῖ καθ' αἶμα συνήπτοντο εἵποντο ἐκείνῳ καὶ προπέμποντες ἐκύκλουν τὸν νεκροφόρον ἄντικρυς ὀκλαδῖαν, τὰς οἰκείας τύχας, οὐκ ἐκεῖνον ἀποκλαιόμενοι.

⁵³⁹ *Scholia to Plutus* 1063: ἀντὶ τοῦ πανουργικῶς. ἐπεὶ οἱ κάπηλοι ὀνθυλεύουσι τὸν οἶνον, συμμιγνύντες αὐτῷ σαπρὸν. οἱ κάπηλοι ὑμῶν θολοῦσι τὸν οἶνον.

⁵⁴⁰ *Suda* κ 336: μεταβολεύς, πραγματευτής. κάπηλος ἀσπίδων. ὁ μετάβολος παντὸς πράγματος. The quotation is drawn from Aristophanes, *Peace* 447.

[The word] is also [used] by Sophron in the *Seamstresses*. Whereas Aeschylus calls all trickery hucksterism (καπηλεία): "offering the skills of a huckster."⁵⁴¹

It is more than possible that Choniates plays with the above ideas, which stemmed from the comic tradition and which openly link the tavern-keepers which cheating, petty bargaining and with exacting money (unfairly) for oneself: Theodore seems to share all the characteristics of a comic politician known from Aristophanic plays.

Just as was the case with the episodes pertaining to John of Poutza and John Kamateros, Choniates' literary game with iambic/comic tradition delves even deeper than this. What has escaped all the commentators so far is the usage of an extremely rare term ὀκλαδία, which, on the surface seems to refer to a kind of a 'folding chair,' in which the sickly, overeaten body of Theodore was carried. The word itself appears in the numerous entries in Byzantine *lexika*, and Choniates, a fact which should not be surprising by this point of my analysis, is the sole historiographer to employ it in his narrative,⁵⁴² and as it is with a very good reason that Niketas used it here.

The source of the term itself is to be found in Aristophanic *Knights*: almost at the end of the play, when the Sausage Seller has already outdone Paphlagon (Cleon) in his shamelessness, he exchanges some sentences with a newly rejuvenated and 'boiled off' (ἀφέψησας) Demos:

Sausage Seller: Oh, and I thought you had a liking for such babblers?

Demos: God forbid! I shall force them to go hunting, and not to toss their votes [anymore]!

Sausage Seller: Now, if that's the case, have this folding chair for yourself, a little uncastrated he-goat. Just take it for yourself, and use him front and back, whatever you'll like.⁵⁴³

With this reference, we return to imagery like the one present in the portrayals of John Kamateros and John of Poutza. Choniates seems to be playing with the reader once again by means of quoting an obscure term, which derives from comic tradition and which opens the entire array of connotations. First, the Greek lexicological tradition connects the noun ὀκλαδία to the verb ὀκλάζω, which denotes the act squatting, or as *LSJ* has it 'a crouching with bent hams.' *Suda* glosses on the term in the following way:

A folding stool, at times stretched out, at others folded up. And again: "Those who leap into deep marsh," which refers to a frog.⁵⁴⁴

The iambic imagery evoked by the reference to the term cannot escape the reader's attention. As Henderson notes, ὀκλασίς and ὀκλάζω both refer to a position assumed by the horse prior to mounting, and in the *lexika* it is linked to the verb κύπτω, already employed by Choniates in his depiction of two gluttonous Johns.⁵⁴⁵ Just like this verb, ὀκλάζω refers to a position characteristic of the animals, and whenever man assumes such a stature, it is always demeaning and humiliating: an imagery which is perfectly in line with iambic aesthetics, where

⁵⁴¹ *Suda* κ 337: ὁ δὲ Αἰσχύλος τὰ δόλια πάντα καπηλεῖα καλεῖ· κάπηλα προφέρων τεχνήματα

⁵⁴² Except from that, the word appears mainly in the *lexika* or grammatical treatises.

⁵⁴³ Aristophanes, *Knights* 1381–1386: Ἀλ. οὐκουν καταδακτυλικὸς σὺ τοῦ λαλητικοῦ; Δημ. μὰ Δί', ἀλλ' ἀναγκάσω κυνηγετεῖν ἐγὼ τούτους ἅπαντας, παυσασμένους ψηφισμάτων. Ἀλ. ἔχε νυν ἐπὶ τούτοις τουτονὶ τὸν ὀκλαδίαν καὶ παῖδ' ἐνόρχην, ὃς περιοίσει τόνδε σοι· κἄν που δοκῇ σοι, τοῦτον ὀκλαδίαν ποίει. The literal sense of the last verse is as follows: 'and if you should like so, make a folding chair out of him.'

⁵⁴⁴ *Suda* ο 109: Ὀκλαδίας: ὁ συγκεκλασμένος δίφρος, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἐκτεινόμενος, ποτὲ δὲ συστελλόμενος. καὶ αὖθις· βαθεῖαν εἰς ἰλὺν ὀκλαστὶ πηδώντων. περὶ βατράχου ὁ λόγος.

⁵⁴⁵ Henderson, *Maculate Muse* 180; Henderson links the verbs ὀκλάζω and κύπτω, both pointing to the idea of being 'mounted' while stooping.

exposed positions serve as an emblem of effeminacy and uselessness. Placed in a basket, half-dead, with his body assuming an animal-like position, Theodore managed the affairs of the state. It is interesting to observe how, according to Choniates, this vulnerable and awkward position contrasted with the factual influence of Theodore who, exactly as John of Poutza in the reign of Manuel I, was divested with an infinite power. With cruel irony, Choniates comments:

None affair was brought to accomplishment without his knowledge [scil. Theodore], but no one who held authority partook with the seat of Kastamonites, and everyone stood [in front of him] in a position befitting to a slave.⁵⁴⁶

Once more, the passage from the *Knights* points not only to political, but also sexual exploitation and Choniates might have used the term for another time on purpose, in order to invest the passage with additional deriding tone. The ‘folding chair’ in the above-cited excerpt from the *Knights* refers not to a kind of stool, but to a horny (i.e. uncastrated) boy-slave, who is at the disposal of Demos to be used in any way he likes, “to fold him front and back.” Again, through the playful usage of phrases drawn from the ancient comedy, Choniates might be peppering the passage with sexual overtones, a literary technique which perfectly correspond to iambic and comic aesthetics. Unlike in the cases of John of Poutza and John Kamateros however, in this passage the sexually charged overtones rather round up Theodore’s utter physical passivity, which is brought about the sickness that ravaged and debilitated his body. Such a farcical tone can be gleaned from the excerpt cited below: deadly sick Theodore, united in one with his ‘folding chair,’ and indeed almost transformed into it, bore striking resemblance to a coffin (νεκροφόρον):

The people, the state senate, and the emperor's blood relations followed behind him in escort and surrounding the chair as though it were a casket, they bewailed not him but their own fortunes.

As Choniates comments further on, it was such a half-dead body that Isaakios agreed to vest in purple cloak, which, in normal circumstances was reserved only to the emperor: an unnatural event that was happily brought to a successful end thanks to the disease which consumed and wrecked Theodore’s body.

I have already stressed, following Worman’s theoretical framework, that the focal point of iambic insult centres on the body, its orifices and outflows. The grotesque iambic σῶμα is an uncontained entity, open, sickly and outflowing. I have shown how this crude iambic physiology functions within the insulting talk of performative iambic poetry of Psellos, or in the case of John Kamateros, where it pointed to his boorish and bombastic speech production. In the case of the literary portrait of Kastamonites the grotesque, transmogrified body which leaks through it apertures functions as a symbol of dissolving body politic of the empire on the one hand, and as an emblem of everything that should be socially and politically rejected. Having described how the imperial τάξις was overturned, with the sickly, exacting and gluttonous Kastamonites assuming the power which should belong to the emperor only, Choniates states explicitly that it was nature itself that brought back the proper order reality, by aggravating Theodore’s state of health:⁵⁴⁷

Indeed, the affairs were leaning towards the unfamiliar and were opposite to nature itself, until benevolent sickness, which takes mercy on those who feel

⁵⁴⁶ Nik. Chon. *History* 438.7–9: οὐ γὰρ ἦν τι τῶν γινομένων ἐκείνου ἄνευ διαπραττόμενον, ἀλλ’ οὐδέ τις καὶ τῶν ἐν ὑπεροχαῖς συμμετεῖχε τῷ Κασταμονίτῃ καθέδρας, ἀλλὰ παρίσταντο πάντες δουλοπρεπεῖ σχήματι.

⁵⁴⁷ For such reversals in Choniates’ narrative see KALDELLIS, “Paradox.”

no pity for themselves, fell heavily on the man because of the [inner spread] of the harmful matter, which disseminated through the dislocated joints, and afflicted more acutely his logical reasoning.⁵⁴⁸

Of course, Choniates, in accordance with his IAMBIC taste for the obscene and abominable details, continues to describe minute details of Theodore's degrading sickness which, at the very same time, exhibits the full scope of the ailment which consumed the late 12th-century body politic. Let us observe how the deadly culmination of its symptoms is included by Choniates in the narrative at the very moment when Theodore, contrary to what should be, is divested by Isaakios with infinite power and is officially being addressed as 'despot' and 'emperor':

When the fifteenth day of August came Kastamonites ... heard [being addressed] as despot and emperor, for this is the way that the toadies and flatterers were wont to address the rulers. To the one who were cleverer from those who had assembled, it seemed that the novelty of what Kastamonites had heard brought about the attack of epilepsy. Some judge of the velum who happened to be close by (I shall leave out his name on purpose), relaxed his clothing and bound Theodore's loins with his belt in order to secure the upward movement of the matter. Besides these symptoms, he fell into the irredeemable state of frenzy ... Afterwards, for a short time Kastamonites recovered from his cachexia and spent the remainder of the day in high spirits. Then he fell ill again and after several days, he gave up his life. His body became sick in a different way and his buttocks became porous.⁵⁴⁹

Again, the passage is filled with iambic motifs, many of which I will discuss again in the accounts of the failed coup of John Komnenos the Fat: indeed, the entire humorous collapse of Theodore (if we are to believe Choniates) is attributed to the very fact that he was named emperor for the very first time. As if his it had been too much for his body (and likewise for the body politic) it triggered a severe attack of epilepsy, which ended up in the complete dissolution of his body. Of course, the primary function of such an imagery is to lampoon and mock Theodore by playing with the iambic ideas of ugliness, shameful and exposed postures as well as deformed body.

In compliance with the literary mechanisms of *iambos*, Choniates does not present Theodore's body in its entirety. We are only allowed to see his loins which are bound with a belt, in a failed attempt to bring Kastamonites to consciousness in his severe attack of delirium. The function and purpose of such an imagery might become clearer if we turn to the anthropological insights into human body as a 'natural symbol' proposed by Mary Douglas.

⁵⁴⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 438.17–21: καὶ ἦν ὄντως τὰ πράγματα μετακεκλικότα πρὸς τὸ ἀσύνηθες καὶ τῇ ἰδίᾳ φύσει ἀντιτασσόμενα, ἕως τις νόσος φιλόανθρωπος τοὺς μὴ ἑαυτοὺς ἐλεοῦντας οἰκτειρήσασα ἐπέβρισε τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐξ ὕλης μοχθηροτέρας, ἣτις τὰ ἄρθρα τοῦ σώματος ἀναμοχλεύουσα ἐπενέμετο καὶ ἐπέθετο τῷ λογιστικῷ κραταιότερον.

⁵⁴⁹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 438.22–439.7: Ἦγε δὲ τότε πεντεκαίδεκάτην ὁ Αὐγουστος μὴν καὶ ὁ Κασταμονίτης ... πρῶτως ἀκούσας δεσπότης καὶ βασιλεὺς, ἐπεὶ καὶ τοῦτο προσεφεῖτο ἐπιλέγειν τοῖς κόλαξι καὶ τοῖς αἰκάλλειν εἰωθόσι τοὺς δυναστεύοντας, ἔδοξε τοῖς κομψοτέροις τῶν συνελθόντων εἰς ἐπιληψίαν ἀποκλῖναι διὰ τὸ καινότερον τοῦ ἀκούσματος. ἀλλὰ καὶ τις τῶν τοῦ βήλου κριτῶν παρεστῶς (τὸ δὲ ὄνομα ἐκὼν ὑπερβήσομαι) διαχαλάσας τὴν ἐσθῆτα ἐδέσκει τὰς γαστροκνημίδας τοῦ λογοθέτου τῇ ζώνῃ τῆς ὁσφύος, ἐπισχῆσιν τὸ ἀνωφερὲς τῆς ὕλης ἐντεῦθεν πειρώμενος. πληρὸν ὁ μὲν καὶ οὕτως ἀλύτως εἶχε τῆς τῶν φρενῶν παρακοπῆς ἀλλὰ τότε μὲν βραχὺ τι καὶ ὅσον ἡδυτέραν τὴν ἡμέραν ὑπολογίσασθαι τῆς καχεξίας ἀνανεύσας πάλιν ἐμπέπτωκεν εἰς αὐτὴν καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ἀπέρρηξε τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ ἄλλως ἀσθενικὸς ὢν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν ἔδραν ὑπὸ νόσου πολύτρητος.

The organic stratum, the bodily processes, the crude mechanics of physiological life must always be hidden from the dignified social occasions:

According to the rule of distance from physiological origin, the more the social situation exerts pressure on persons involved in it, the more the social demand for conformity tends to be expressed by a demand for physical control. Bodily processes are more ignored and more firmly set outside the social discourse, the more the latter is important. A natural way of investing a social occasion with dignity is to hide organic processes. Thus, social distance tends to be expressed in distance from physiological origins and vice versa.⁵⁵⁰

With Theodore's sick, uncontrolled and grotesque body, the rites which were supposed to celebrate the death of Theotokos turn to farce. The particular situation which happened on that very day is, for Choniates, a metonymy of the decomposition of imperial power under the Angeloi dynasty: the cachexia of Theodore is the wasting syndrome of the imperial body.⁵⁵¹ Hence, using Douglas's, Choniates strives to distance the aberrant state of the empire which ultimately led to its collapse from the solemn occasion during which it occurred.

Two more salient points merit our attention at this point. First, it appears unusual that Choniates ends his portrayal through a startling statement which refers to Theodore's buttocks, which were supposedly to become full of pores (or holes) as a result of his debilitating sickness. Whatever Choniates is referring to,⁵⁵² the very reference seems to staple the entire passage together by its persistent reference to iambic physiology. As I have already underlined in chapter one, one of the standard feature of iambic aesthetics is its connection of γλῶσσα, as an organ which consumes and produces the speech, and πρωκτός.⁵⁵³ Indeed, if we return to the very beginning of the episode, the entire presentation of Kastamonites inclination towards sophistic speechifying. Certainly, it would be impossible to establish how consciously Choniates uses human mouth and butt as a 'comic' frame which opens and ends the portrayal. It is however tempting to postulate that such imagery is used here on purpose: after all the production of worthless speech, foul eating habits and emitting excreta from one's mouth was a standard motif in Byzantine invectives which stemmed ultimately from the ancient iambic tradition.⁵⁵⁴

One more short passage merits attention. Concluding the entire episode, Choniates notes sarcastically:

The ugliness is even more conspicuous when juxtaposed with beauty. After Kastamonites had died, a worthless youngster, who was rather in need of studying under the elementary teacher with his tablet, succeeded to the emperor's favor.⁵⁵⁵

A phrase from the opening sequence might be yet another pun on Aristophanic material which neatly rounds all of the above-discussed topoi. If we juxtapose it with a verse drawn from *Knights*, immediately after which Aristophanes introduces the ὀκλαδία to be used at Demos' liking, the convergence of words and motifs is interesting:

⁵⁵⁰ M. DOUGLAS, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London–New York 1970 (repr. 2003), xxxiii.

⁵⁵¹ See *Suda* κ 1152.

⁵⁵² Surely, the 'holes' in the buttocks might have been related to Theodore's probable diabetes, which normally causes multiple skin changes, but the exact sickness and its aetiology are not as important here.

⁵⁵³ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 91, 107, 246.

⁵⁵⁴ For this see for instance VAN OPSTALL, "The Pleasure of Mudslinging."

⁵⁵⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 439.9–11.

Choniates, *History*: Ἐκδηλότερον δὲ τὸ αἰσχος ἐγγὺς τοῦ κάλλους ὁρώμενον.

Aristophanes *Knights* 1321: Αἰ. τὸν Δῆμον ἀφεψήσας ὑμῖν καλὸν ἐξ αἰσχροῦ πεποίηκα.

What actually connects both sentences, is their overt ironical tone. Sausage Seller purportedly 're-boils' and rejuvenates Demos who instantly returns to his previous bad habits: he engages effeminizing sexual intercourse and is again fed with bits and pieces by the politicians who exploit his stupidity. Choniates' words essentially convey a similar meaning: after Kastamonites' decline and death and after the fatal collapse of his sick body the affairs of the state seemed to have been improving. It turned out at once that nothing could have been further from truth. A comely youngster who succeeded Theodore turned out to be an equal failure: an incompetent boor of prodigious appetites.

Commenting on the thematic structure of *History*, Kazdan noted that at the heart of Choniates' literary technique lies the insistence recurrent farcical atmosphere at Constantinopolitan court which enhances reader's impression of the downward spiral of the aggravating internal situation. The same actions seem to be repeating several times, while the court officials merely seem to be changing names, each one of them is guilty of the very same sins.

Let us see how this recurrence works in the passages which comes directly after Theodore's death and which refer to Constantine Mesopotamites, another individual in the long chain of profligate court officials:

Once the other [man] one had died, a little boy girded up the reins of the imperial administration, who had given up his pen and ink not even a year ago ... His took for himself far greater power than Kastamonites and whatever seemed just to the emperor, he did it willingly. He was a humble-bee or a gnat which buzzed around the lion's ear, or a black-skinned ant-man who governed an elephant, the heaviest burden known on the earth, or a fine cord which was dragged through camel's nose, one could even say that a dense earwax fell into the ears of the emperor like a wrapping. This aged boy fought along with others to be loved beyond any measure by the emperor, and to be deemed first before all else. He was sophistic in his character, witty, he always had thoughts of many kinds, he was also crafty, and all these were indicated by the line of his eyebrows which was continuous and without any separation. Besides, his inclination towards trade and the infinite crediting endeared him to the emperor: not only did he creep on secretly and caught in his snare coins from all possible sources and laid ambushes for those who were under the court arbitrations, but also, he gaped for melons and flat cakes and took every possible pain to taste all the foodstuffs in the world.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁶ Niketas Choniates, *History* 439.13–441.3: Καὶ τούτου τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν βίον ἀπολιπόντος, παιδίον μικρὸν τὴν τῶν κοινῶν διοίκησιν ἀναζώννυται, οὕτω πέρυσιν ἀφειμένον δονακίσκου καὶ μέλανος, ... πολλαπλασίονα οὖν καὶ οὗτος τοῦ Κασταμονίτου τὴν ἰσχὺν ἐνεδέδυτο κάκεῖνα τῷ αὐτοκράτορι θεμιτά, ὅποσα οἱ θελητὰ ἐδέδοκτο. Καὶ ἦν βομβυλιὸς ἀτεχνῶς εἶτε κώνωψ ὅτιον περιβομβῶν λέοντος ἢ μυρμηκάνθρωπος μελάγχροος τὸ τῆς γῆς μέγιστον ἄχθος διακυβερνῶν ἐλέφαντα ἢ μήρινθος λεπτή ἀπὸ ῥίνος ἐφέλκουσα κάμηλον, εἶπε δ' ἂν τις οὐκ ἀκόμψως καὶ παχεῖα κυψελὶς περὶ τὸ τῆς βασιλικῆς ἀκοῆς ἐνσκήψασα ἔλιγμα Συνεμάχετο δὲ τῷ παιδιογέροντι τούτῳ πρὸς τὸ ὑπερφιλεῖσθαι παρὰ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος καὶ εἶς ἀντὶ παντὸς λογίζεσθαι καὶ τὸ ἦθος μὲν σοφιστικὸν καὶ εὐτράπελον ὃν καὶ τὸ πολυειδὲς ὡσαύτως τῆς γνώμης καὶ ὕφαλον, ἐπεὶ καὶ κατηγορεῖ ταῦτα τούτῳ ἢ τῶν ὁφρύων γραμμὴ συνεχὴς φυεῖσα καὶ μηδὲν τι μεταίχμιον ἔχουσα. πλεον δὲ μᾶλλον προσωκείου

Just as was the case with John Kamateros and Kastamonites, Choniates opens his comic/iambic literary portrait with two themes which we have already encountered: lack of proper education and the production of crafty, manipulative and excessive speech. The vivid animalization of Mesopotamites lies within the standard arsenal of iambic insulting talk, but unlike in the cases of Kamateros, or Psellos' Jacob there are no mentions of an ox, hence of a standard iambic guise of a boor. Two phrases should be of interest in this place, i.e.: "the mosquito buzzing around the lion's ear," and "a black-skinned ant-man leading about the elephant." Both, at least on a surface level play upon the difference of age and position between the emperor, enhanced by the very size of the animals which are referred to: a mosquito versus lion/ an ant versus elephant. Yet the use of the rare word μυρμηκάνθρωπος is indeed startling. Again, Byzantine *lexika* offer substantial assistance in this instance as well.

The 'Ant-man' was, as the encyclopedic tradition preserves, the title of a long-lost play composed by Pherecrates, an author, not at all coincidentally, from within the circle of Athenian Old Comedy. *Suda* merely acknowledges that the *Μυρμηκάνθρωποις* was a play penned by Pherecrates (Μυρμηκανθρώποις Φερεκράτης γράφει).⁵⁵⁷ Other entries, scattered throughout the lexicon, and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* mention different unrelated quotations from his purported plays:

Aratai: meaning 'prays,' 'calls down curses upon someone', or 'invokes.'
Pherecrates (writes) in the *Ant-men*: 'first she curses, then calls upon his father.'⁵⁵⁸

To be sure, deliberately using a rare word drawn from the comic tradition, Choniates signals his reader the intended comic overtone of the entire passage. In addition, we can vividly see another important mechanism of *iambos*: Choniates 'reshapes' Constantine's body into animal and grotesque forms in order to bring his dangerous characteristics to the fore and simply to lampoon him. Thence the visual images of a black-skinned (a trait probably pointing to 'barbarous' and foreign look of Constantine) ant-man, or of a buzzing mosquito. In the comic tradition both nouns μυρμηκάνθρωπος and κώνωψ were linked with those public speakers who produced far too many senseless words, spoke excessively, aggressively and foolishly. To be sure, Choniates was fully aware of such an interconnection and in his *Speech* 11, he explicitly links an 'ant man' with Homeric Thersites, a prototype of a cowardly, ugly and aggressive abuser known from the Old Comedy.⁵⁵⁹

Similarly, a mosquito, because of the annoyingly buzzing sound produced by the movement of its wings, became in the comic and iambic literary tradition a metonym for the chattering and prattling rhetors who continuously swarmed Athenian agora and troubled the Athenians with their idle, excessive, foolish and irrational prattle. We can surely find suchlike use of κώνωψ in Aristophanic *Plutus*. Addressing the Poverty, Chremylos, the main protagonist

τῷ βασιλεῖ τὸ ἐμπορικὸν φρόνημα καὶ ὁ ὑπεράπειρος λημματισμός· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τοῖς ἐξ ὕλης παντοίας στατήρσιν ἐνσκολιευόμενος ὑφεῖρπε καὶ ἐνήδρευε τοῖς πρὸς δίαίταν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ποπάνοις ἐνελύττα καὶ ἐνέχαινε πέποσι καὶ ξύμπαν ἄλλο περιειργάζετο τῆς γῆς ὠραῖον ἐδώδιμον.

⁵⁵⁷ *Suda* μ 172.

⁵⁵⁸ *Suda*, α 3743 (cf. α 61) Ἀρᾶται: εὐχεται, ἢ καταρᾶται, ἢ ἐπιθειάζει. Φερεκράτης Μυρμηκανθρώποις: ὕστερον ἀρᾶται, κάπιθειάζει τῷ πατρί. *Suda* φ 212 identifies Pherecrates as an author of 17 comedies, who accompanied Alexander the Great.

⁵⁵⁹ Niketas Choniates, *Speech* 11.112: Ἀλλ' ἐντα<ῦθα> τοῦ λόγου γενόμενος οἶδα ὡς ἂν τις τὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐκεῖνο ἐπαπορήσει μοι· 'εἷς, δύο, τρεῖς· ὁ δὲ τέταρτος ποῦ;' τοῖς εἰρημένοισι τρισὶν ἀντάρταις πολὺς ἐγκείμενος παραζηυχθῆναι καὶ τέταρτον τὸν μυρμηκάνθρωπον ἐκεῖνον καὶ θερσίτειον τὸ εἶδος προφέροντα, ἢ καὶ ὡς σπυρίδα μίαν τοῦ τῶν τροπαίων σου περισσεύματος ἀρθῆναι καὶ τοῦτον καὶ δοθῆναι τῷ λόγῳ ἰσχυρίζο<με>νος

of the play, debates what good can poverty do to a man and is highly doubtful whether it could really improve one's life:

And what good thing can you give us, unless it be burns in the bath, and swarms of brats and old women who cry with hunger, and clouds uncountable of lice, gnats and flies, which hover about the wretch's head, trouble him ...⁵⁶⁰

Again, in Aristophanic *Knights*, in yet another part where the Sausage Seller and Cleon (Paphlagon) riffle through absurd and incongruous sets of oracles, while trying to determine which one of them will finally be leading Demos, Cleon observes:

Condescend again to hear me and then judge: "A woman in sacred Athens will be delivered of a lion, who shall fight for the people against clouds of gnats with the same ferocity as if he were defending his whelps; care ye for him, erect wooden walls around him and towers of brass."⁵⁶¹

Moreover, the scholia to Aristophanic comedies explicitly connect the mosquitos to the public speakers and offer additional comments on the usage of the term 'buzzing mosquito':

αἱ βομβοῦσαι: [the term referring] especially to the fleas, since they are voiceless, they say that they 'buzz'. And it even pertains better to the mosquitos ...⁵⁶²

'against the mosquitos' (κῶνωψι): [that is] against the orators. That is to say, he talks about the Medians.⁵⁶³

Therefore, labelling someone as 'mosquito' evokes again the standard patterns of iambic insult, which were centered around manipulative, onerous and aggressive babblers.⁵⁶⁴ Certainly, it is with these ideas in mind that Choniates used the noun κῶνωψ and its usage becomes even clearer when we turn to how he describes the role of Constantine. Not only did this 'buzzing mosquito' exerted bigger influence upon the Emperor than Kastamonites: he was the sole individual who openly and shamelessly manipulated Isaakios, buzzed around his head and filled it with crooked ideas. He possessed a sophistic character, witty, hypocritical and secretive (τὸ ἥθος μὲν σοφιστικὸν καὶ εὐτράπελον ὃν καὶ τὸ πολυειδὲς ὡσαύτως τῆς γνώμης καὶ ὕψαλον). A visible sign of these, as Choniates comments, were his eyebrows, which formed one, black straight line (καὶ κατηγορεῖ ταῦτα τούτῳ ἢ τῶν ὀφρύων γραμμὴ ξυνεχὴς φυεῖσα καὶ μηδὲν τι μεταίχμιον ἔχουσα).⁵⁶⁵

The portrait of Mesopotamites is of course rounded up by an all-too-familiar theme which links personal greediness, exacting character, the unjust collection of state revenue with uncontrolled consumptive habits. It is exactly this love for money that endeared Mesopotamites to Isaakios, as Choniates observes (καὶ ἐνήδρευε τοῖς πρὸς δίαίταν). Although the historian did not choose to elaborate and create an extended scene which would describe Mesopotamites' gluttony it worth focus on some of the terms Choniates uses here: for we

⁵⁶⁰ Aristophanes, *Plutus* 535–539: Χρ. σὺ γὰρ ἂν πορίσαι τί δύναι' ἀγαθὸν πλὴν φῶδων ἐκ βαλανείου καὶ παιδαρίων ὑποπεινῶντων καὶ γραῖδίων κολοσυρτόν; φθειρῶν τ' ἀριθμόν καὶ κωνώπων καὶ ψυλλῶν οὐδὲ λέγω σοι ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους, αἱ βομβοῦσαι περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀνιῶσιν, ἐπεγείρουσαι καὶ φράζουσαι "πεινήσεις· ἀλλ' ἐπανάστω."

⁵⁶¹ Aristophanes, *Knights* 1036–1041.

⁵⁶² *Scholia to Plutus* 538: αἱ βομβοῦσαι: ἰδίως τὰς ψύλλας ἀφώνους οὔσας βομβεῖν φησι· κωνώπων γὰρ [μᾶλλον] τοῦτο ἴδιον ...

⁵⁶³ *Scholia to Knights* 1038 a: κῶνωψι: τοῖς ῥήτορσιν, ἡγουν τοῖς Μήδοις λέγει.

⁵⁶⁴ WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 25–30.

⁵⁶⁵ A physical feature which Mesopotamites shares with Alexios V Doukas Mourzouphlos, who had lion's share of responsibility for the catastrophe of 1204, hence Choniates might be playing here with proleptic omens.

read that he raved after the round cakes and gobbled up melons (ποπάνοις ἐνελύττα καὶ ἐνέχαινε πέποσι), along with all other possible edibles in the world.

Lynda Garland suggested that just as Poutza's ζωμός and Kamateros' κυαμοί, the πόπανα might bear sexually charged overtones and might refer to Aristophanic imagery. Given the overtly comic tone of the passage, such a reading seems highly plausible. We have already encountered the πόπανα (hence literally the round cakes) in the overtly sexual in tone passage from *Ecclesiazusae*, the very one where Smoios 'slurps the soup' and eats female 'round cakes.' Just as John of Poutza was an ardent lover (ἡράσθη) of ζωμός, Mesopotamites "raves after" (ἐνελύττα) the cakes and stuffed himself with melons (ἐνέχαινε πέποσι).⁵⁶⁶ I have already commented on how the derivative of the verbs χάσκω and χαίνω within the tradition of *iambos* and comedy link the spheres of eating, speaking and sexual fulfillment/exploitation, a feature which is surely alluded to in this passage. Moreover, the word πέπων denotes not only melon, but any kind of ripe fruit and the very idea of 'ripeness' is frequently used in the Old Comic tradition as a metonym for the rejuvenation and readiness to sexual intercourse.⁵⁶⁷ The three areas are indistinguishably linked in yet another telling passage from *Knights*, which Choniates might have had in mind:

Leader of the Chorus: And justly too; you devour the public funds that all should share in; you treat the treasury officials like the fruit of the fig tree, squeezing them to find which are still green or more or less ripe (ἢ πέπων ἢ ἢ μὴ πέπων); and, when you find a simple and timid one, you force him to come from the Chersonese, then you seize him by the middle, throttle him by the neck, while you twist his shoulder back; he falls and you devour him ...⁵⁶⁸

The uncontrolled desire, the gaping mouth, the profligate excessive appetites, consumption of food and fulfillment of one's sexual desire – all the iambic themes are once more reused by Choniates in his vivid portrayals of the two influential officials, who were vested with an infinite power by Isaakios II Angelos. The consumptive, sickly and disintegrated iambic body strengthens the farcical atmosphere which pervaded, according to Choniates, at the imperial court in Constantinople during the last quarter of the twelfth century. The emperors of the Angeloi family quickly reshaped Constantinople into luxurious and lascivious Sybaris: Isaakios himself was more interested in faring sumptuous tables, drunken ribaldries attended by dwarves, prostitutes and peppered with obscene jokes than on anything else. The state revenues, instead of being used to improve the almost non-existent imperial fleet or to enlarge the army, were spent on profligate entertainments. The actual power was relegated to the officials who cared only for their personal gain and 'ate up' the state revenue, which, as Choniates remarks, 'flowed into the gut of the whore.'⁵⁶⁹ The repeatedly occurring patterns of gluttony, sickness, drunkenness, lasciviousness finally led to the catastrophic events of 1204:

The naval expedition after it had departed from Epidamnos, arrived at the island of Kerkyra, where it ceased for twenty days. When they [i.e. the

⁵⁶⁶ HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* 144 notes that πόπανον is a metonym for a female vagina in the *Ecclesiazusae* 843, just as other tapes of cakes in the comedies by Aristophanes or any food which consumption involved munching, *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* 65, 103, 149.

⁵⁶⁸ Aristophanes, *Knights* 258–264: ἐν δίκη γ', ἐπεὶ τὰ κοινὰ πρὶν λαχεῖν κατεσθίεις, κάποσυκάξεις πιέζων τοὺς ὑπευθύνους, σκοπῶν ὅστις αὐτῶν ὥμός ἐστιν ἢ πέπων ἢ ἢ μὴ πέπων. καὶ σκοπεῖς γε τῶν πολιτῶν ὅστις ἐστὶν ἀμνοκῶν, πλούσιος καὶ μὴ πονηρὸς καὶ τρέμων τὰ πράγματα.

⁵⁶⁹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 230.8–9: καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἀρχιλόχου ἄντικρυς ἐπεραίνετο, ὃ φησιν, εἰς ἔντερον πόρνης πολλάκις μεταρρυῖσκεσθαι τὰ χρόνῳ καὶ πόνῳ συλλεγένητα μακρῶ.

Venetians] realized that the citadel could not have been easily conquered, they quickly spread out their sails and directed towards the City of Constantine, for the Westerners knew already for a long time that the Roman Empire devolved to nothing else than drinking bout and revelry and that Byzantis [was transformed into] Sybaris, which was unjustly praised for its luxury.⁵⁷⁰

4.6. Conclusion

Essentially, in *History* Choniates presents his readers with an all-too-familiar story of a golden age that would never return (i.e. the rule of John II Komnenos),⁵⁷¹ of steady decline and fall and of an imminent catastrophe. This story is cast into a sophisticated narrative, within which the comic/iambic elements play an important corrective function, which expose all the vices and aberrant behaviors which inevitably resulted in the tragic collapse of the state in 1204. Gluttony, drunkenness, lechery, profligacy of the subsequent emperors essentially turned Constantinople into the epitome of all its vices: The Queen of the Cities was transformed into a biblical harlot. In fact, at the very same time the image closely resembles the only extant Byzantine portrait of gluttony as a richly clad and beautiful woman:⁵⁷²

O, what obscenities you have suffered and witnessed! Widely celebrated for her accomplishments and her famous deeds, you assumed the face of the harlot. Celebrated and renowned, you have taken on a harlot's face. Gone away now are your simple beauty, your modest manners, your wise and self-disciplined way of life. Your face is painted with cosmetics and paints; you have made yourself ready for wanton pleasures and you have changed your form for licentious deeds. Those who have violated you, remodeled your past simple beauty, your loveable and admirable form into that of a harlot.⁵⁷³

And indeed, the gluttoned wasteful harlot was bound to be punished and fall: once the Latins have taken the possession of Constantinople, the city no longer reminds her old beautiful self. It turned to a beaten old crone, a character which was a laughing stock of the Old Comic tradition.⁵⁷⁴ Finally, the tragic collapse of the state was turned into bitter farce, as Choniates writes:

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.: 541.11–16: Ὁ δὲ στόλος ἄρας ἐξ Ἐπιδάμνου τῇ τῶν Κερκυραίων παρενέβαλε καὶ περὶ τὰς εἴκοσιν ἡμέρας σχάσας ἐκεῖθι τὸν πλοῦν, ὡς ἔγνω τὴν ἄκραν δυσεπιχείρητον, εὐθὺ τῆς Κωνσταντίνου τὰ λαίφη διαπετάννυσιν· ἥδεσαν γὰρ ἐκ μακροῦ τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων οἱ ἀφ' ἐσπέρας ἀρχὴν ἐς μηδὲν ἕτερον περιστᾶσαν ἢ κραυπάλην καὶ μέθην καὶ τὴν Βυζαντίδα Σύβαριν ἀτεχνῶς τὴν ὑμνουμένην ἐπὶ τρυφῇ.

⁵⁷¹ For this see SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates* 231–231.

⁵⁷² MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion* 112. Otherwise, gluttons were depicted as dangerously looking foreign men: I. ANAGNOSTAKIS, “Dining with Foreigners” in: *Flavours and Delights*, Idem (ed.), 157–164.

⁵⁷³ Niketas Choniates, *History* 449.4–9: Αἱ αἱ τῆς αἰσχροῦργίας, οἷα πέπονθας, οἷα τεθέασαι. ὅψις πόρνης ἐγένετό σοι χρῆμα περίπυστον καὶ πρᾶγμα περιδοξόν. καὶ φροῦδον μὲν σοι τὸ ἀπέριπτον ἐκεῖνο κάλλος καὶ τὸ τοῦ τρόπου αἰδῆμον καὶ ἡ σώφρων καὶ προτέρα ἐγκρατὴς διαίτα, περιέργον δὲ καὶ μετεγγραφὲν ἐντρίψει καὶ φαρμάκοις τὸ σὸν πρόσωπον, καὶ διεσκεύασαι πρὸς τρυφὴν καὶ πρὸς ἥθος ἀκόλαστον μετερρύθμισαι· οἱ γὰρ σε βιασάμενοι τὴν πρώην ἀπεριέργως καλὴν καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἀγαστὴν καὶ ἐπέραστον πρὸς τὸ ἐταιρικὸν μετεπλάσαντο σχῆμα Choniates draws here from a Biblical image of luxuriously clad and dangerous harlot, see GACA, ‘Porna’.

⁵⁷⁴ P. MARCINIAK, “It is not what it Appears to Be: A Note on Theodore Prodromos’ Against a Lustful Old Woman,” *Eos* 103 (2016) 109–115.

I shall not mention those who struck at the lyre and sing your misfortunes, altering your tragedy into comedy in their wine stupor, and those making ludicrous narration of your miseries the craft of their lifetime ...⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 577.19–23: ἔῳ γὰρ λέγειν τοὺς πρὸς λύραν ἐντείνοντάς τε καὶ ψάλλοντας τὰ σὰ δυσπαργήματα καὶ κωμωδίαν τιθεμένους τὴν σὴν τραγωδίαν ἐν τῷ τὸν οἶνον προσίεσθαι καὶ βίου τέχνην ποιουμένους τὴν γελοιώδη τῶν κακῶν σου ἀφήγνσιν ...

5. THE MONSTROUS CONSUMPTIVE BODY ON THE IMPERIAL THRONE: THE CASE OF THE COUP OF JOHN KOMNENOS 'THE FAT'

In this final chapter I shall move a couple of years back in time and discuss the literary sources, which focus on one of the most enigmatic episodes in the history of the twelfth-century Byzantium. Although we know that it all happened on the 31 July, the exact year of the occurrence cannot be established with certainty. It was either 1200 or 1201, and both years were convincingly argued for.⁵⁷⁶ With the 'sad quarter' of the twelfth century, coming to end, to use Alicia Simpson's term,⁵⁷⁷ the internal situation in Constantinople and the Empire was aggravating. The inept emperors of the Angeloi family along with their greedy officials (if we are to believe Choniates, of course), has already changed Constantinople into another Sybaris, while the members of the aristocratic classes were ceaselessly plotting to overthrow them.⁵⁷⁸ On this very day, it was John Komnenos' chance: nicknamed 'Fat', he was on the way to seize the imperial throne for himself.

There are four literary sources for the coup at our disposal: two publicly speeches, addressed to the emperor Alexios III, which praise him for a rapid quenching of the uprising, authored by Euthymios Tornikes and Nikephoros Chrysoberges, and two narrative pieces: a short, but vivid excerpt from Choniates' *History* as well as the *Narrative* (λόγος ἀφηγηματικός) composed by Nicholas Mesarites.⁵⁷⁹ The episode itself has already attracted an ample attention from the scholars, both from historical and literary perspective.⁵⁸⁰ Kazdan, who authored the most comprehensive comparative analysis of them, concluded that all the authors (with an exception of Mesarites)⁵⁸¹ were drawing from a common pool of 'conventional' images which circulated at that time in Constantinople,⁵⁸² and "are cast in the same conventional mold."

While I appreciate Kazdan's contribution, I am not entirely certain whether the adjectives 'standard' and 'conventional' really capture the essence of what we are dealing with here. At least, not in the sense that Kazdan used those adjectives. I am also not fully convinced whether the images were simply in mouth-to-ears circulation and that there is simply all to it. Indeed, I would like to argue that the exact opposite is the case, and that we are dealing with an entirely unique situation here.

⁵⁷⁶ M. ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites. His Life and Works (in translation)*. Edinburgh 2017, 31–31 basing upon the internal evidence in Choniates' *History* argued that the failed coup must be dated to 1201. J. DARROUZÈS, "Les discours d'Euthyme Tornikès (1200-1205)," *Revue des études byzantines* 26 (1968), 49–121 at 51, basing upon the evidence from three speeches by Choniates which date back to the period of 1200–1202, advocated for 1200.

⁵⁷⁷ A. SIMPSON (ed.) *Byzantium 1180–1204: A Sad Quarter of The Century*. Athens 2015.

⁵⁷⁸ K. SMYRLIS, "Sybaris on the Bosphoros"; CH. BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts the West*. Cambridge (MA) 1986, 117–157 showed that the period of the Angeloi was an unending chain of usurpations of the imperial throne (both failed and successful) and external defeats.

⁵⁷⁹ Summary (in French) and the edition of the speech by Tronikes is available in DARROUZÈS, "Les discours" 53–72; for Chrysoberges see M. TREU (ed.) *Nicephori Chrysobergae ad Angeloi orationes tres*. Breslau 1892, 1–12. A. HEISENBERG, *Nikolaos Mesarites, Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*. Würzburg 1907. The English translation and discussion of some aspects of Mesarites' account is available in ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 31–74; Choniates' short account is located in Niketas Choniates, *History* 526.34–528.80

⁵⁸⁰ For Mesarites (generally as a literary source) see M. ANGOLD, „Mesarites as a Source: Then and Now, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 40.1 (2016) 55–68; IDEM, *Nicholas Mesarites* 31–42; and A. KAZDAN–S. FRANKLIN, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Cambridge 1984 2245–255. For Tornikes see DARROUZÈS, "Les discours" 49–52.

⁵⁸¹ He labelled Mesarites' narrative as atypical, but more due to its dynamics and eyewitness character than to the imagery which is the main point of my interest, KAZDAN–FRANKLIN, *Studies* 224.

⁵⁸² KAZDAN–FRANKLIN 247.

The very nature of the sources at hand adds significantly to the idiosyncrasy of the described event. On top of two orations by Tornikes (otherwise an author of a witty invective against a ravenous bishop of Seleukia, composed in iambic meter)⁵⁸³ and Chrysoberges, the coup is accounted, on the one hand, in one of the most (if not the most) complex literary works from the entire Byzantine millennium. On the other, Mesarites, who authored the longest account was, as Angold has recently shown, a figure who operated on the margins of the late twelfth-century literary circles in Constantinople. Unlike Choniates, Tornikes and Chrysoberges was not included in the literary θέατρα of that time and did not compose any literary piece on imperial commission.⁵⁸⁴ Even more strikingly, he openly admits that he merely writes to please himself and, as a result, fell short of the literary standard of his times.⁵⁸⁵ Surely, Angold is right to remark that it is precisely because of this ‘shortage’ that his writing is so appealing, vivid and direct.

In contrast to Choniates and others, Mesarites did not hold one of the highest imperial posts,⁵⁸⁶ and the peak of his career ended in playing the role of *skeuophylax* (sacristan) at the Church of Pharos, which was situated in the complex of the Great Palace in Constantinople.⁵⁸⁷ He was directly responsible for taking care of the sacred liturgical vessels of the sanctuary within his jurisdiction and it was thanks to this very fact that he was present in the Palace during the coup.⁵⁸⁸ Last but not least, both Choniates and Mesarites chose ‘voluntary’ exile after the capture of the City by the Latins, and both expressed their tragic awareness that their life will end up amongst the barbaric people of Asia Minor (Nikaia). Both were fully conscious that it was, among many other factors, due to the internal strife that the imperial power collapsed in Constantinople and fell into the hands of the Latins.⁵⁸⁹

The idiosyncrasy of the event was further strengthened by its protagonist, John Komnenos Axouch, who, paradoxically enough, was not the central figure of the coup. As a matter of fact, he was the grandson of Alexios Komnenos and the eldest son of John II, the very one who was left out during the succession in favor of a younger male progeny of John, (i.e. Manuel Komnenos). Since his early days John ‘the Fat’ had been a failure, a politically unimportant figure, who came to the fore only through the machinations of Alexios Doukas Mourtzouphlos.⁵⁹⁰ On top of that, Turkish blood was running in his veins: his father Alexios Axouch, a *megas domestikos* under John II and a *protostrator* under Manuel I, was half-blood ‘Persian,’ a fact which cast his real loyalties to doubt.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸³ Though Kazdan labels all Tornikes’ works again as “conventional” “clichéd”: *ODB* 3 2093. See the poem in W. HÖRANDNER, “Dichtungen des Euthymios Tornikes in Cod. Gr. 508 der rumänischen Akademie,” in *Wolfram Hörandner. Facettes de la littérature byzantine. Contributions choisies*, P. Odorico–A. Rhoby–E. Schiffer (eds.), Paris 2017, 104–127. Cf. the poem no. IV (ed. G. Mercati) by Michael Grammatikos and a short poem by Christopher of Mytilene 135 (ed. E. Kurtz).

⁵⁸⁴ ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 2–4; 19.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 2

⁵⁸⁶ SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates* 11–67.

⁵⁸⁷ *ODB* II 1346;

⁵⁸⁸ A. KAZHDAN, “Skeuophylax” in *ODB* III 1907–08.

⁵⁸⁹ M. ANGOLD, “Mesarites as a Source” 55–68 on revising and recomposing their own literary works: for Choniates’ case see SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates* 80–103 and GAUL, “Andronikos Komnenos” 638 n. 63 and 657–658 for revisions and amendments made by Choniates in the codex Par. Gr. 1778. For Mesarites’ case see ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 34. If Angold’s assertion that Mesarites was on the margins of the Byzantine literary salons, then the question arises why he would even bother to revise his text.

⁵⁹⁰ BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts the West* 122. It was of course Mourtzouphlos who later assumed the lion’s share of responsibility for the sack of Constantinople in 1204.

⁵⁹¹ KAZDAN, *ODB* I “Axouch” 279.

Having been set on the side track of the imperial politics John seems to have enjoyed himself with mundane pleasures of life: a trait which he apparently inherited from his father. It was only when John's father was made to be tonsured that he restrained himself, as Choniates ironically comments:

For Alexios Axouch, having assumed his black habit, and was lifted by the desire of the divine matters, and was incited to reach to the highest of virtues ... He used to be the most ardent lover of meat-eating, he pleased himself with abundance of food and arranged lavish banquets. While he overflowed with riches, he enjoyed all with all the pleasantries of the world, up to point where a table full of meat was prepared for him [even] during the feast days (that is on Wednesdays and Fridays) ... then he would be eating herbs [only], feast on fruits and would sacrifice the unburnt offerings from the tables and would simply suffer from hunger. After some time, once he was celebrating a holiday, he would find pleasure in eating fish for a meal, and especially when he reminded himself how he took lavish meals and over-abundantly prepared meat in the past, he named it a prudery of one's gut and a way to incite appetite, which is displayed by the gluttons and meat-eaters, since they say that they are unable to restrain themselves anyhow ...⁵⁹²

Unlike his father, however, John seems not to have chosen to limit his raging appetite and his luxurious way of living, which, if we are to believe our sources, rendered him morbidly obese. Hence, could we imagine a candidate suited better for a literary invective of any kind than a fat, half-witted 'straw man' of barbaric ancestry who usurped the imperial throne for just a day and whose enormous bodyweight caused the imperial throne to collapse in pieces?⁵⁹³

Rather than being 'conventional and clichéd,' the texts at hand are reporting a unique situation, unparalleled in Byzantine literature. Surely, it was not every day that a morbidly fat usurper had a chance to sit on the imperial throne in Constantinople. Moreover, the coup happened during the time which concluded the period of 'Komnenian literary modernism,' which promoted and encouraged experimentation and transgression of traditional generic boundaries. Hence, in what follows, I would like to focus on heretofore ignored aspects of the accounts composed by Choniates and Mesarites and speeches by Tornikes and Chrysoberges, namely the fat and sickly body and its uncontrolled passions. In the present chapter I would like to argue that the authors of the accounts engage in a deep intertextual literary play with ancient comic/iambic tradition. Seen from this perspective, it cannot be said that they are merely repeating phrases and degrading epithets drawn from a 'common pool' which were in

⁵⁹² Niketas Choniates, *History* 145.14–18: Καὶ Ἀλέξιος μὲν τὸ μέλαν ἀσπασάμενος ἄμφιον τοῖς θείοις ἐκουφίζετο ἔρωσι τοῦ ἀκροτάτου τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐφιέμενος ... κρεωδαισίας δ' ἄκρος ὦν ἐραστής καὶ καρυκείαις χαίρων βρωμάτων καὶ πανθοινίαις προσκείμενος, ὀπηνίκα πλούτῳ πολλῷ περιεργεῖτο καὶ τοῖς κατὰ κόσμον ἐνευπάθει τερπνοῖς, ὡς καὶ τὰς νηστίμους τῶν ἡμερῶν (τετράδα φημί καὶ παρασκευὴν) κρεωβόρον αὐτῷ παρατίθεσθαι τράπεζαν ... τότε ποηφαγῶν καὶ ταῖς ὀπώραις ἐνεστιώμενος καὶ ταῖς ἀκάπνοις θύων τῶν τραπεζῶν καὶ τὸ πεινῆν πεινῶν ἀτεχνῶς, ὅψε δὲ καὶ ἰχθύων ἐνεορτάζων ταῖς παραθέσεσιν ἔχαιρεν ὅτι μάλιστα καὶ μνήμην τῶν προτέρων λαμβάνων ὀψαρτυμάτων καὶ τῆς περιέργου τῶν κρεῶν δαιτρεύσεως ἀκκισμὸν ἐκάλει κοιλίας καὶ ὀρέξεως μέθοδον ὅσα οἱ ἀδοηδάγοι καὶ κρεωφάγοι προτίθενται μὴ δύνασθαι λέγοντες τοῦ ἄγαν ὑποχαλᾶν.

⁵⁹³ Probably the only better-suited candidate from the Graeco-Roman heritage that I comes to my mind was probably consul Eutropius known to us from Claudian's invective: a physically debilitated eunuch who was chosen to act as a consul, a catamite, a pimp, an abusive magistrate who 'prostitutes' the provinces, and a failure of a military commander: Claudian, *Volume I*, M. Platnauer (transl. & ed.) [LCL 135], Cambridge MA 1922, 138–229.

circulation at the imperial court and streets of city, and which had no deeper meaning hidden behind them.

Therefore, it will be my aim to exhibit and analyze, in the first place, the apparently comic air of the accounts, which has not been discerned in any of the studies proposed so far. Just as was the case with Psellos' invectives, the *Timarion*, Choniates' portraits of gluttons and tyrants, the comic comes hand in hand with the iambic: the bodily, the repulsive, the grotesque and the monstrous. Again, I would like to show that all these features are strengthened by a conscious exploration of iambic motifs and themes drawn from ancient literary tradition which were re-appropriated to social and political concerns of the late twelfth- /early-thirteenth-century Byzantine Empire.

5.1. Some Context: The Historical Background of the Coup

Before I turn to the analysis itself, I would like to summarize briefly the historical background of John's coup, since it is essential to understand some of the crucial elements which all the accounts are playing upon.⁵⁹⁴ It was yet another insurgence in quite a long line of conspiracies which aimed at deposing Alexios III Angelos from the throne in the years 1198–1201. The inept administration, profligacy at the imperial court and a series of crashing military defeats did not court popularity to the imperial regime both from the side of the populace and the aristocracy.⁵⁹⁵ Vast groups of Byzantine society were either fed up with the inefficient administration or took the incompetency of Alexios III as an opportunity to seize the imperial scepter. The lower strata and the guildsmen were infuriated by Alexios' attempted introduction of a new heavy tax to bribe the German Emperor Henry VI not to attack Constantinople (called the 'Almanikon'),⁵⁹⁶ while the members of those aristocratic families which installed Alexios to the throne, fueled by greed and angered by his preference of the Palaiologos and Laskaris clans, wished to see him divested of all power.

The breakthrough of the twelfth and thirteenth century witnessed a number of attempts at coup d'état. The uprising of the populace against the unjust imprisonment of a wealthy banker named Kalomodios (somewhere in between 1198–1200), the riots caused in the city provoked by the custodian of the imperial guard, John Lagos, who wished to sequester voluntary donations to the prisoners which quickly turned to an open uprising against the emperor, a conspiracy instigated by one of the Kontostephanoi brother which was quickly and brutally quenched by emperor's wife, Euphrosyne are only the most conspicuous examples of the mood prevailing in Constantinople.⁵⁹⁷ The greediness of the ruling classes which Andronikos I Komnenos attempted to end, went out of every limit and the 'Sybaris on the Bosphoros' was sliding towards the bottom of the slippery slope.

It was in these circumstances that the rebellious uprising 'led' by John Komnenos was staged on the 31 July exactly in the moment when Alexios had just returned from a successful campaign against the Seljuk Turks. While John's Turkish lineage made him vulnerable to the charge of being inspired by his factual 'barbaric' kin (which is one of the these played upon by

⁵⁹⁴ Detailed historical accounts of this otherwise obscure event are present in, BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts the West* 122–124; M. ANGOLD "The Anatomy of the Failed Coup: The Abortive Uprising of John the Fat" in *Byzantium, 1180–1204: "The Sad Quarter of a Century"?* A. Simpson (ed.). Athens 2015, 113–134; IDEM, *Nicholas Mesarites* 32–35.

⁵⁹⁵ SMYRLIS, "Sybaris" passim.

⁵⁹⁶ BRAND, *Byzantium Confronts the West* 123

⁵⁹⁷ ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 35.

all the sources), Michael Angold seems to be correct in pointing out that the coup was a 'local' Constantinopolitan affair with no connection to the East, or to the Turkish agents residing in the city whatsoever.⁵⁹⁸ Therefore, even if John was a 'puppet' that was used to conceal the actual instigator of the revolt, these were not the Seljuks who stood behind him. According to a note, which is visible in the only extant manuscript which contains Mesarites' text, it was Alexios Doukas Mourtzouphlos (the future Alexios V and the murderer of his predecessor Alexios IV), who staged the entire revolt.⁵⁹⁹ The descendant of the Komnenoi family was a perfect straw-man to be used for this particular purpose: it must have seemed that John's primary purpose was to reinstate his clan in the imperial throne in Constantinople.

The ultimate reason for the coup cannot be clearly defined. It seems that all of the above-mentioned factors played part in it: the dissatisfaction of a part of aristocratic families which were hostile to the Doukai and Laskarides, the anger of the common people against Alexios' profligacy and incompetence and the overall mood of a looming catastrophe. The details of the event itself can only be inferred from the sources.⁶⁰⁰ The revolt broke out in the Hagia Sophia where the city rabble staged the coronation of the usurper and swore allegiance to him. The conspirators moved quickly to the Hippodrome and then proceeded onwards through the Karea Gate to the Great Palace. When the night arrived, the rebels, composed of representatives of aristocracy and the populace,⁶⁰¹ started robbing the Palace. Seeing this, Mesarites and realizing that the fate of the holy relics is endangered, supposedly organized a vigorous defense of them. In the meantime, Alexios' troops sneaked easily into the undefended palace complex and started cleansing it. John attempted to escape but was caught in the Hippodrome: begging dramatically the soldiers, he tried to save his life in vain. His head was cut off while his enormous body was massacred. The revolt was successfully quashed by the emperor.

5.2. Staging the Comedy: The Comic Body on the Σκῆνη

Discussing Psellos' invectives against Sabbaites and Jacob I have argued that the characterization of Byzantine monk through the lenses of his insatiable γαστήρ facilitated the usage of comic/iambic elements within a literary text. Strikingly similar mechanics can be gleaned from the narratives penned by Choniates and Mesarites, as well as from the speech composed by Tornikes. Opening up his account, Mesarites gives the reasons why he got down to writing: supposedly, there were so many people asking him what happened, that his throat failed him because of excessive speaking, so he decided to present "the details of the decapitation of this half-wit (παρὰφρων)."⁶⁰² Of course, the connection of fatness, gluttony and mental slowness was one of the regularly recurring themes in the iambic and comic traditions. The proverbial pseudo-Homeric Margites, whom I have mentioned before, is a very good case in point: the protagonist of the lost mock-epic attributed to Homer was a man

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. 34. For the study of Turks who came to and resided in the imperial service in the 11th and 12th centuries see CH. BRAND, "The Turkish Element in Byzantium: eleventh–twelfth centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989) 1–25.

⁵⁹⁹ B. HENDRICKX–C. MATZUKIS, "Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos: His Life, His Reign and Death (? – 1204)" *Hellenika* 31 (1979) 108–132 at 112 attribute the note to the year 1259 (similarly Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West* 122), however ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 34 does not exclude the possibility that it was added much earlier by the author himself during the process of revision.

⁶⁰⁰ ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 35.

⁶⁰¹ Niketas Choniates, *History* 526.39–41

⁶⁰² Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §2 20.1.

characterized by gargantuan appetites and utter stupidity, as Plato reports in *Alcibiades*, Margites knew everything, but he knew it completely wrong.⁶⁰³

In the episode which depicts the mock coronation of John, Mesarites first vividly characterizes the followers John as “the populace, a rabble, the common herd, scum, drunkards, inebriates, addicts” (ὁ πολὺς λαὸς καὶ συρφετώδης καὶ ἀγελαῖος καὶ ξύγκλυς, ὁ μέθυσος, ὁ οἰνόφλυξ καὶ πάροις) and then adds jokingly:

What such people wanted to see was John – borne aloft despite being grossly fat – take down the imperial crown, which hung above the altar and place it – impostor that he was – on his foolish and witless head [τῇ μεμωραμένη ἐκείνου καὶ ἄφρονι κορυφῇ].⁶⁰⁴

Again, the excerpt might serve as a good example of the Hermogenean theory of the comic discourse, which I have discussed with regards to Psellos’ *In Iacobum*. Mesarites plays here with juxtaposing antithetical ideas and mixes high and low elements. What should normally be a solemn official occasion, is celebrated by the lowest social strata who do it in their drunken stupor. It is them who wish to witness how the monstrous body of John, being verily fat (τὸν ὄντως παχὺν Ἰωάννην), to be ‘lifted up.’ Indeed, the long-standing tradition commanded to raise a newly crowned emperor on a shield, and this is precisely what Mesarites points to in this passage.⁶⁰⁵ What downgrades the solemnity of this proceeding is the very weight of John’s body: surely, raising him up on the shield required quite considerable resources. Furthermore, the comic overtone of the entire situation is further strengthened by a stark contrast of what is placed on John’s foolish head. It is not even a proper crown but a headband (ταινίαν βασιλικήν). Further on in the narrative, Mesarites elaborates that the headband looked more like an element of actors’ costume (οἷον ἄν τις ἐπὶ μέσου φέροι ἄνθρωπον σκηνικόν)⁶⁰⁶ rather than a porphyry-and gold-edged imperial diadem.

The comic air is further intensified by how the coronation itself looked like. It was not directed by the patriarch of Constantinople, as it should have been according to the protocol, but by some destitute monk who arrived at the imperial city from the East (which is again a pun on John’s Turkish origins), who begged on the streets of the city, because he consumed up everything which he brought with him. According to Mesarites, he was a naïve rustic “one of the great unwashed, wrapped up in a goatskin (ἐγκεκορδυλημένος σισύρα) and a tunic, which was torn to ribbons.”⁶⁰⁷ To be sure, Mesarites used the participle ἐγκεκορδυλημένος with a clear purpose. It should not surprise us that the term derives from Aristophanic *Clouds*. In the scene, where the participle ἐγκεκορδυλημένος is used, the prodigal son of Strepsiades,

⁶⁰³ Plato, *Alcibiades* 147c: ἐκεῖνος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ λέγων τὸν Μαργίτην πολλὰ μὲν ἐπίστασθαι, κακῶς δέ, φησί, πάντα ἡπίστατο. on Margites also see *Suda* μ 187.

⁶⁰⁴ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §5 22.12–16: Ἦν οὖν ἰδεῖν ὑπὸ τοιούτων τὸν ὄντως παχὺν Ἰωάννην ἐκεῖνον ἀειρόμενόν τε καὶ κουφιζόμενον, ἰμειρομένων καὶ τὴν ἐπηρτημένην τῆς ἱερᾶς ἄνωθεν τραπέζης καθελεῖν ταινίαν βασιλικήν καὶ περιθέσθαι ταύτην ἐμπαικτικῶς τῇ μεμωραμένη ἐκείνου καὶ ἄφρονι κορυφῇ. In all cited excerpts from Mesarites, I am following the most recent English translation by ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 42–74.

⁶⁰⁵ ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 45 n. 51. For a general discussion of the origins and further fate of the custom (not limited to Byzantine Empire) see H. TAITLER, “Raising on a Shield: Origin and Afterlife of a Coronation” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 8.4 (Spring, 2002), 501–521. For Byzantium see KAZDAN Change 113–155 who noticed that the custom was gaining more popularity in the eleventh and twelfth century due to the overt militarization of the official image of the emperor. Also see C. WALTER, “Raising on a Shield in Byzantine Iconography,” *Revue des Études Byzantines* 33 (1975), 133–175.

⁶⁰⁶ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §5 24.22.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.* §5 22.23–24.

Pheidippides, having lost all money while betting on horse races, snores and farts while sleeping covered in five blankets:

STREPSIADES:

... Neither does this excellent youth awake through the night;
but takes his ease, wrapped up in five blankets.⁶⁰⁸

[ἐγείρεται τῆς νυκτός, ἀλλὰ πέρδεται
ἐν πέντε σισύραις ἐγκεκορδυλημένος.]

The juxtaposition of two terms ἐγκεκορδυλημένος and σισύρα in the excerpt from the *Narrative* does not seem to be a mere accident. Mesarites rather leaves a clear intertextual allusion, which refers the reader of the text directly to Aristophanic comedy and which intensifies the humorous air of his narrative. This assertion becomes even stronger, if we consider the fact that there are strong parallels between the two characters: both are characterized by boorishness (ἄγρουκία), they both revel away their sustenance on their enjoyments, as a result of which they can only cover themselves with some ragged pieces of clothing.⁶⁰⁹ Certainly, Ilias Giarenis was right to assert that Mesarites showed particular fondness to re-use Aristophanic words and images with the clear intention to laugh down his opponents and enemies.⁶¹⁰

Moreover, the entire presentation of the ‘ceremony’ only strengthens such a farcical atmosphere. The above-mentioned headband which was supposed to be placed on the usurpers head was hanging down from the ceiling of the chamber which was out of reach for a normally built person. Mesarites describes in minute detail, how the dirty monk who is clad in a ragged robe and who leads the coronation rite takes a long reed (κάλαμος), reaches out to the supposed crown and manages to detach it.⁶¹¹ While the scene is humorous and farcical in itself, once again Mesarites carefully chooses the words which he employs in order to achieve the comic effect expounded in Hermogenean theory of the comic: the unexpected usage of antithetical meanings and mixing the low and high elements. Κάλαμος, on the one hand, reinforces the boorishness of the destitute monk: in the Greek tradition the reed is regularly connected to the occupations of the lower social strata, hence fowlers, fishermen, farmers, croppers and doctors.⁶¹² Moreover, as we can glean from the *Clouds* and a *scholion* to the verse 1006, κάλαμος was used as a component of wreaths, the simplest and the most artless ones.⁶¹³

At the same time, Mesarites plays here with the Biblical tradition. He likens the reed, which placed the mock-crown on John’s head to the biblical sickle of Zacharias (δρέπανον Ζαχαρίου), known from *Zechariah* 5:3, where it symbolizes God’s revenge against those who

⁶⁰⁸ Aristophanes, *Clouds* 10–11.

⁶⁰⁹ See also *Suda* e 86, which quotes *Clouds* 10–11 while glossing on the term.

⁶¹⁰ I. GIARENIS, “Προσλήψεις τῆς ἀρχαιότητος στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Νικολάου Μεσαρίτη,” in *Ἡ πρόσληψη τῆς ἀρχαιότητος στὸ Βυζάντιο, κυρίως κατὰ τοὺς παλαιολόγειους χρόνους* G. Xanthaki-Karamanou (ed.), Athens 2014, 79–108 at 90: “Ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ λογίου στὸν Ἀριστοφάνη καὶ ἡ ἀξιοποίηση τῶν κωμωδιῶν του γιὰ τὴν ποτελεσματικὴ διακωμώδηση τῶν ἀντιπάλων ἐμφανίζεται καὶ σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ ἔργο. Γιὰ τοὺς στασιαστὲς καὶ τὸν ἐπικεφαλῆς τους ἡ μετρημένη χρῆση ἀριστοφανικῶν στοιχείων ὑπηρετεῖ τὸν συγγραφικὸ στόχο.” As a matter of fact, Giarenis is the only scholar who presented a study of re-use and re-appropriation of ancient Greek literature in the works composed by Mesarites.

⁶¹¹ Mesarites, *Narrative of the coup* §5 22.26–36.

⁶¹² *LSJ*.

⁶¹³ Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1006: στεφανωσάμενος καλάμῳ λεπτῷ μετὰ σῶφρονος ἡλικιώτου; *Scholia to Clouds* 1006a: στεφανωσάμενος καλάμῳ λευκῷ: λιτὸς γὰρ καὶ ἀπερίεργος ὁ τοιοῦτος στέφανος.

do not abide by the divine law.⁶¹⁴ The entire image is ended by Mesarites with a playful comment, which points to the future beheading of the monstrous usurper:

What is there to say about this crown? ... Speaking in metaphors, a hurricane catapulted the crown on to his head, while an earthquake shook it off again.⁶¹⁵

The crown, or to be more precise the headband (ταινία), reinforces the impression that the entire occurrence seemed like a staged comedy, rather than a real event. I have already shown that Mesarites connects the ταινία, which was placed on John's head to the man-of-the-scene (ἄνθρωπον σκηνικόν). The pun of these words seems to be at least twofold. First and foremost, John is labelled as an actor, because he simply is a straw man, a phantom who is steered by Alexios Mourtzouphlos and the other rebellious aristocratic families. Secondly, he merely seems to play in a comedy directed and controlled by someone else and it resembles the comic 'ape in porphyry'⁶¹⁶ rather than a rightful emperor. It is interesting to observe how Mesarites closely links straightforwardly unkingly attire of John, his actor-like headband and the polysemy of the word σκῆνη:

It was as though John was an actor on this Persian stage set, which happened to be the handiwork of a relative on his grandfather's side. Though wearing a crown, he was not arrayed like an emperor, but seated on the ground, symbolised the unbearable weight of disaster, which had overtaken the wretched man.⁶¹⁷

By referring to the 'Persian stage set,' Mesarites once again mocks John's Turkish origins and clearly points to the fact that he is simply a straw-man, a figurehead who follows the script written by somebody else. Moreover, what Mesarites refers to in this passage is the palace chamber, which John's father chose to decorate with the frescoes presenting the hunting scenes in which the main protagonist was Kilij Arslan (the very same individual whom Andronikos reviled as a 'Limping Arslan').⁶¹⁸ Being an actor and playing the main role in this farce, John does not even sit on the throne like a proper emperor, but is portrayed while sitting on the ground like a suppliant. The bare weight of usurper's body only reinforces his complete passivity:

He was borne along by unrestrained judgement of the majority, indolent by nature and obtuse, led not leading, receiving, not giving orders commanded not commanding, controlled not controlling, dominated, but in no way dominating,

⁶¹⁴ Cf. Chrysoberges, *Speech I* 7.3–8.16

⁶¹⁵ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §5 22.30–36: τί πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν στέφανον εἶπη τις; οὗτος οἷά τις λαῖλαψ τὸν τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐξεσφενδόνησε στέφανον, οὗτος οἷά τις σεισμός τὴν τούτου κατέσεισε κεφαλὴν.

⁶¹⁶ *Suda* π 1581: Πίθηκος ἐν πορφύρᾳ: παροιμία. ὅτι οἱ φαῦλοι, κἂν καλοῖς περιβληθῶσιν, ὅμως δ' οὖν διαφαίνονται πονηροὶ ὄντες.

⁶¹⁷ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §28 45.10–13: Εἶχεν οὖν ἡ Περσικὴ σκηνὴ τὸν σκηνικὸν Ἰωάννην, τὸ τῆς πρὸς πάππου συγγενικῆς ἔργον χειρός, τεταινιωμένον οὐκ ἐστολισμένον βασιλικῶς, ἐφιζημένον χαμαί, σύμβολον τοῦτο τοῦ κατειληφότος τὸν ἄθλιον πάθους καὶ τοῦ ἀφορήτου τῆς συμφορᾶς.

⁶¹⁸ The evidence for this is present in Kinnamos' *Epitome* 267.13–17. CH. BRAND, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos by Johannes Kinnamos*. New York 1976, 199: "Returning some time later to Byzantion, when he wished to adorn one of his suburban dwellings with murals, he [Alexios Axouch] did not emblazon on the ancient Greek feats, nor did he set forth the emperor's deeds, things which he has achieved in wars and beast hunts, such as is more often customary for those who hold governmental offices." and *ibid.* 200: "Neglecting these [subjects], Alexius ... commemorated the sultan's [Kilij Arslan's] martial deeds, foolishly making public in painting in his residence what should have been concealed in darkness."

under authority not exercising it, a servant not a mater, carrying out the orders and exhortations of others.⁶¹⁹

The identification of John as a comic actor was surely facilitated by his monstrous posture. In ancient Greek tragedy and comedy human body was used as political entity. In her analysis of the meaning of body in ancient Greek drama, the main concern of tragic σῶμα was the civic ideal, the body of the comic actors on the stage was its direct opposite and stood as a symbol of “anticivic excess, sexual abandon and unmilitary anti-athletic slackness.”⁶²⁰ For this reason one of the most pronounced feature of the ancient comic costume was a padded belly, which stuck out conspicuously and other grotesque features like overgrown and padded buttocks, protruding phalluses and bizarrely smiling masks. Mesarites, schooled in the Byzantine *curriculum studiorum*, must have been fully aware of these features of the comic costume and might have pointed to these features once he was constructing his literary portrait of John. Moreover, casting John into the role of actor not only indicated that he was steered from behind the scenes, but also helped Mesarites to mock the usurper: the profession of the actor was deemed to be degrading and becoming only to the lowest social classes.⁶²¹

Nonetheless, Mesarites is not the only author who invested their accounts with a pronounced comic/mocking air.⁶²² Quite similarly, Choniates sustains similar comic overtones in his short yet witty account of the failed coup. From its very outset John is characterized as “some chap from the Komnenian clan” (τις ἐκ τοῦ τῶν Κομνηνῶν γένους) who had “a bulging gut and resembled a *pithos*” (προκοίλιος δ’ ὢν καὶ πιθώδης).⁶²³ Both images are familiar and the πιθώδης γαστήρ of John points not only to his comic-like and grotesque stature, but also, just as it was the case with Jacob in Psellos’ invective, to his potential drunkenness and insatiable appetites. Unlike Mesarites however, Choniates does not dwell in detail on the mock-coronation but provides the readers with an equally humorous yet verbatim scene. The comic flavour of the sentence is built upon the contrast of the heaviness of his body and the very act of ‘slipping into’ the palace:

Suddenly he slipped into the Great Church and put on his head one of the little crowns which hung suspended all around the altar.⁶²⁴

This comic stupid fatso, as we read further on, did not even care to set guards at the imperial palace which he occupied. As a result, the emperor Alexios III Angelos had absolutely no difficulties to enter with his troops to the palace and to deal with the rebels in a fitting

⁶¹⁹ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §8 24.22–28: τῇ τῶν πολλῶν ἀκαθέκτῳ γνώμῃ φερόμενον, νωθοκάρδιον πάντῃ καὶ δύσκωφον, ἀπαγόμενον οὐκ ἀπάγοντα, ἐπιτασσόμενον οὐ προστάσσοντα, κελευόμενον οὐ κελεύοντα, κρατούμενον οὐ κρατοῦντα, κυριευόμενον οὐ μένουσαν κυριεύοντα, ἐξουσιαζόμενον οὐκ ἐξουσιάζοντα, δουλαγωγούμενον οὐ δουλαγωγοῦντα, παντὸς ἐκπληροῦντα κέλευσμα, παντὸς προτροπήν.

⁶²⁰ FOLEY, “Comic body” 275.

⁶²¹ As Andy White put it: “Of all the professions that have come down to us tainted with infamy, the actors’ has to be at or near the very bottom ...” A. A. WHITE, “Never trust an actor: The spectacle of dying mimes & mock baptisms in late antiquity” in *Miscellanea Byzantina* I. P. Marciniak–T. Labuk (eds). Katowice 2016, 131–147 at 131.

⁶²² Contrary to what Kazdan asserted, it does seem that all four authors engage in a literary ἄγων, consciously reusing each other’s material and attempting to surpass each other through employing new imagery, appropriating the terms used by others in a different context or presenting a similar scene from a different angle.

⁶²³ Niketas Choniates, *History* 526.34–36: Ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ κακοῦ παρελθόντος, ἐκ τοῦ τῶν Κομνηνῶν τις γένους τῷ βασιλεῖ ἐπανίσταται, Ἰωάννης τοῦνομα· προκοίλιος δ’ ὢν καὶ πιθώδης τὴν πλάσιν τοῦ σώματος τὸν Παχὺν εἰς ἐπώνυμον εἴληχεν.

⁶²⁴ Niketas Choniates, *History* 526.38–39: οὗτος τοῖνον τῷ Μεγίστῳ Νεῷ ἐξάπινα εἰσρυσὶς καὶ τῶν στεφανίσκων ἓνα τῇ κεφαλῇ περιθείς,

manner. Instead of setting guards at the gate of the palace, John sat in the palace chambers, emptying out the entire vessels filled with water (an interesting excerpt which I shall discuss at more length in the next section of this chapter).⁶²⁵

Equally humorous and comic tone is maintained by Tornikes' speech considerable part of which is dedicated to the failed attempt of usurpation by John the Fat. Such an inclusion of comic imagery or even grotesque style in an oration which officially delivered during a religious festivity is certainly not an unparalleled phenomenon in the twelfth-century Byzantine literature. Andrew F. Stone discussed how Eustathios of Thessalonike peppered his speech, which was supposed to celebrate the imperial wedding with comic and grotesque imagery. As Stone pointed out, all these humorous features of Eustathios' oration are related to the images revolving around food preparation and its consumption: the imperial feast, organized in order to decorate the wedding, has changed the entire city of Constantinople almost into a banquet hall, and the festivity quickly changed into a drunken cyclopean revelry.⁶²⁶

On his part, Tornikes uses John's monstrous fatness and his 'Persian' lineage to mock and ridicule the failed usurper. "Once Persian, always a Persian,"⁶²⁷ as Tornikes comments wittily. Because of his barbaric ancestry, John lives his life wallowing in luxury (ὑπερόγκος), he is a hostile infidel and an apostate (ἀπώφολιος, αποστάτης), a factual "monkey in purple," whose fancy clothes did not conceal his innate disdainful (γαῦρος) nature and Persian cunning,⁶²⁸ and, last but not least, he is a complete dimwit, followed by a throng of fools.⁶²⁹ In the same vein, Chrysoberges ladles out derision and mockery towards the utter stupidity of John. He elaborates on the similarity of John and his supporters to the fable of monkeys, preserved in the Aesopic corpus: the feeble-minded monkeys gathered together on an assembly and discussed how their new city should be founded. They resolved to surround themselves with a wall, so that they might be safe and rejected the advice of an old ape who tried to restrain them and warned them that within the walls they would be easier to caught. As Chrysoberges points out, John and his partisans are not wiser than the ill-advised monkeys: they are equally as foolish and having enclosed themselves in the palace they were easily captured and slaughtered by the imperial troops.⁶³⁰

In Tornikes' speech, all of these negative and laughable features are clearly reflected in the 'comic' presentation of John's stature: he is heavy with meat (κρεωβαρής), has puffed up flesh (σάρξ πεφυσημένος) and an equally fleshy mind (νοῦς σαρκίνος). While Tornikes does not dwell on the events of John's failed attempt at usurpation, he offers a short glimpse into one humorous scene which supposedly occurred during the revolt. Having introduced John as a fat barbaric apostate who is attended by a throng of fools, Tornikes jokingly describes the moment when the usurper sat on the imperial throne:

Those men who had risen with their levers the gates [which were leading] to the imperial chambers of the Great Palace, at once placed the chap (οὔτος), who was heavy with meat, and was panting heavily as if he had been massively

⁶²⁵ Ibid. 526.47–527.61.

⁶²⁶ A. F. STONE, "Eustathios and the Wedding Banquet."

⁶²⁷ Tornikes, *Speech I* §12 67.4–5 Πέρσης δ' αὖθις ὁ Πέρσης ὢν.

⁶²⁸ Ibid. §12 67.5–6: καὶ τοῦτο δὴ πίθηκος, κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, ὁ πίθηκος—τὴν προγονικὴν αὐτοῦ κακίαν καὶ τὸ γαῦρον φρόνημα καὶ περσικὸν οὐκ ἀπέθετο.

⁶²⁹ Ibid. §12 66.19: πάντως τὸν ματαῖον ἐκεῖνον; §12 67.9–10: λαὸν ἀθροίσας μωρὸν καὶ οὐχὶ σοφόν §13 67.12:

Ἦ μωρὸς οὔτος ὄντως λαός.

⁶³⁰ Chrysoberges, *Speech I* 5.13–31; cf. Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* I.3, Aesop *Fables* 361. G. A. KENNEDY, *Progymnasmata, Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*. Atlanta 2003 74–75.

loaded with an enormous cargo ... They placed him on the imperial throne like a useless burden (ἄχθος ἐτώσιον). And the throne did not bear to be a throne any longer: for it was shredded into pieces under the enormous weight and the heavy load of John's body. One could jokingly say that this throne had [its own] mind and did not allow this man to be enthroned as another despot. Otherwise, seeing things clearly, the throne hinted precisely at this one thing, and it prophesized that it was the symbol of John's imminent and complete downfall. Hence straightaway *he that sitteth in the heavens laughs, and he shall have his plans in derision*,⁶³¹ caught him [scil. John] after a short time in a trap which he concealed, and he was not being touched by fire ... and stretching his bow [straight] into his heart; through this *you have cast his throne to the ground. You have shortened the days of his youth, you have covered him with shame*.⁶³²

As can be gleaned from this passage, Tornikes, similarly to Choniates and Mesarites, employs comic mechanics. Once again John, instead of leading actively and ruling, is, similarly to Mesarites' *Narrative*, acted upon as a 'useless burden'. It is the stupid rabble surrounding the fat usurper that acts upon him: the heavy load of his body is pushed into (ἔθεντο) and seated (ἐκάθισαν ἐνθρονισθῆναι) on the throne. Once this has been accomplished by the partisans of John, the imperial throne does not want to be itself anymore, which Tornikes captures in a neat antithesis: ὁ δέ γε θῶκος οὐκέτι θῶκος μεῖναι πάλιν ἠνέσχετο and shreds itself into pieces. Moreover, Tornikes wittily mixes high and low elements: invective and derision is cast at times into Biblical language and imagery. Religious inclusions play an important role in this passage. Firstly, they deepen the laughable air of the entire occurrence: even God himself seems to laugh down at and deride this monstrous body which caused the imperial throne to shatter in pieces. Secondly, they lay bare John's sinful nature: the first Biblical quotation used in the excerpt is drawn from *Psalms* 2, the entire theme of which are earthly heathen kings who rebel against God and upon whom God strikes his cruel vengeance "dashing them in pieces like clay vessels." By the same token, the second citation used by Tornikes is drawn from the *Psalms* 88:44–45, where the psalmist again revolves around the wrath of God.

5.3. The Iambic Discourse Unfolded: Fatness and the Social Scum

It thus seemed natural that, confronted with the task of describing a failed attempt of coup d'état led by a monstrously fat man, the authors of the accounts employed iambic imagery. Such iambic aesthetics, with the persistent focus on the grotesque body, its physiology and its

⁶³¹ *Psalms* 2:4 ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἐκγελάσεται αὐτούς, καὶ ὁ κύριος ἐκμυκτηριεῖ αὐτούς. English translation: NIV.

⁶³² Tornikes, *Speech I* §13 67.12–30: ὦ μωρὸς οὗτος ὄντως λαός, χάλκεα χρυσεῖων κάχληκας τε μαργάρων καὶ φωτὸς τὸ σκότος ἀνταλλασσόμενος· οἷον γὰρ ὁ βασιλεὺς μου πλουτεῖ τὸ κάλλος, οἷαν δ' ἐκεῖνος εἶχεν εἰδέσθαι. Οἱ καὶ τὰς τῶν μεγάλων ἀρχείων πύλας ἀναμοχλεύσαντες ἔνδον ἐπὶ τὰ βασίλεια τοῦτον κρεωβαροῦντά τε τὰ πολλὰ καὶ ἀσθμαίνοντα καὶ ὡς πεφορτισμένον μέγαν φόρτον ἄντικρυς ἔθεντο καὶ—ὦ τῆς ἀνοχῆς σου, Χριστέ βασιλεῦ, —ἐτώσιον τοῦτο ἄχθος ἐπὶ τὸν βασιλικὸν θρόνον ἐκάθισαν. Ὁ δέ γε θῶκος οὐκέτι θῶκος μεῖναι πάλιν ἠνέσχετο· κατεάγη γὰρ ἐς τὸ παντελὲς ὑπὸ τοῦ βαρέος ἐκείνου καὶ νωθοῦ σώματος. Εἶπεν ἂν τις ἀστεῖζόμενος φρενῶν ἐκεῖνον τὸν θῶκον μετέχειν καὶ μὴ παρὰ τὸν ἐκείνου δεσπότην ἕτερον ἐνθρονισθῆναι τούτῳ καταδεχόμενον· ἄλλος δ' εὐθύσκοπα βάλλων καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ὡς ἐνὶ μάλιστα καταστοχαζόμενος, σύμβολον ἐφοίβασεν εἶναι τοῦτο τῆς παντελοῦς αὐτοῦ μετὰ βραχὺ καταπτώσεως. Ἐξεγέλας δὲ ἄρα τοῦτον ὁ ἐν οὐρανοῖς κατοικῶν καὶ ἐξεμυκτηριεῖς τούτου τὰ διαβούλια, ἐν παγίδι ἣ ἐκρυσσε συλληφθησομένου μετὰ μικρὸν καὶ πῦρ μέν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τῆς σφετέρας, ἀνάψαντος καὶ τόξον ἐντειναμένου, ἀλλὰ κατὰ καρδίαν αὐτοῦ· ἔνθεν τοι καὶ «τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ κατέρραξας, ἐσμίκρυνας τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ χρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ κατέχεας αὐτοῦ αἰσχύνην». All excerpts from Tornikes' speech have been translated into English by myself.

overgrown organs is, similarly to the cases of Sabbaites or Jacob, closely connected to John's enormous and insatiable belly. Hence, once again, γαστήρ is used as an axis around which all the iambic mechanics and aesthetics revolve, and all the iambic topoi in the narratives by Choniates and Mesarites (and in small degree in the speeches by Tornikes and Chrysoberges) are directly or indirectly connected to the belly. At the very same time, the iambic discourse in all these texts lacks one of its salient features, namely the metonymic uses of mouth. Yet, it does not appear for a very good reason. As I shall argue see below, all texts present the usurper as an (almost) headless monster: hardly ever are we allowed to see John's countenance, his moving lips or yapping maw.

From all the accounts in question, Mesarites' λόγος ἀφηγηματικός is surely unique in at least one detail which is closely connected to the deriding speech of *iambos*. He persistently links the usurper with social scum and 'filth'. Other accounts seem to be far more 'euphemistic' in this aspect. Choniates does mention the city mob (ὄχλος) which is incited by the spreading news about the coup and decides to join in the rebellion,⁶³³ but otherwise names the supporters of John as the representatives of the aristocratic families the neutral terms like 'the partisans of John' (στρατιώταις τοῦ Ἰωάννου).⁶³⁴ Tornikes goes one step further, identifying John's 'partisans' as a 'stupid mob' (λαός μόρος). Mesarites, however, is far more explicit. He identifies the supporters of John as the representatives of the lowest levels of society, petty criminals and shady-looking individuals. Once the gates of the palace have been broken down, Mesarites narrates how the rabble flows into the buildings, destroying and robbing everything they encounter:

It was a scratch force created spontaneously that came together voluntarily to assist John in his unholy undertaking, that promoted as justice the shedding of blood, forcing entry into homes, shaking foundations, ... profaning the sacred, plundering churches, desecrating the divine ... Who were these people? The populace, a rabble, the common herd, scum, drunkards, inebriates, addicts ...⁶³⁵

Again, once the mock-coronation has been completed, the crowd which accompanied John went further into the complex of the Great Palace. At first sight, they looked like an armed squadron, but in fact they seemed to have resembled the motley crowd like the one which gathered during the ancient Athenian κῶμοι:

Before him went his lieutenants, who looked like men of Ares, but who – from the moment they took a breath of air and saw the sun – were temperamentally effeminate womanisers ... Accompanying them were pimps and prostitutes, adulterers and adulteresses, procurers and panders, drunkards, gluttons, toppers, day and night engaged in Bacchic revelries, happy to drink the lees, children of maenads and Dionysos. You might call them chameleons of the moment: being brave-hearted, when you turned your back, but cowards as soon as anybody challenged them ...⁶³⁶

⁶³³ Niketas Choniates, *History* 526.41 and 43.

⁶³⁴ Ibid. 526.39–40: πλεῖστοι δὲ ἦσαν οὗτοι καὶ σχεδὸν τοῦ ἐπισήμου πάντες αἵματος.

⁶³⁵ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §4 21.34–22.7 αὐτόματος στρατιά, στρατόπεδον ἀπραγμάτευτον, ἐρχόμενον ἀμισθὶ πρὸς τὸ τοῦ Ἰωάννου ἀνοσιούργημα, προθυμούμενον δίκαιον αἷμα ἐκχέαι, οἰκίας ἀναμοχλεῦσαι, θεμέλια κατασεῖσαι, καταχῶσαι ὀρόφους, ἱερὰ κοινῶσαι, συλῆσαι ναούς, βεβηλῶσαι τὰ θεῖα, διάρπαγμα πάντα ... καὶ ταῦτα τίνες; ὁ πολὺς λαὸς καὶ συρφετώδης καὶ ἀγελαῖος καὶ ξύγκλυς, ὁ μέθυσος, ὁ οἰνόφλυξ καὶ πάροις.

⁶³⁶ Ibid. §7 23.33–24.8: τούτου δὲ γε προήγνητο τῷ μὲν ἰδέσθαι ἄνδρες Ἄρεος ὑποστράτηγοι, τῇ δὲ γνώμῃ θηλυδρία τε καὶ γυναιμανεῖς, μικρὸν εὐσεβοῦντες, τὸ πᾶν ἄπιστοι τοῖς κρατοῦσιν, ἐξ ὅτου περ καὶ τὸν ἀέρα ἀνέπνευσαν καὶ τὸν ἥλιον ἐωράκασιν, πόρνους συναγαγόντες συνερίθους καὶ πόρνας, μοιχούς τε καὶ μοιχαλίδας,

The accumulation of rebuking epithets seems to resemble a literary technique which Psellos employed in the *In Sabbaitam*. Indeed, just like Psellos, Mesarites incorporates into his narrative short but equally “stupefying stream of abuse and insult,” to use Bernard’s words in reference to Psellos’ iambic invective.⁶³⁷ A short glimpse into the original text of Mesarites might illustrate this point:

ὁ πολὺς λαὸς καὶ συρφετώδης καὶ ἀγελαῖος καὶ ξύγκλυς, ὁ μέθυσος, ὁ οἰνόφλυξ καὶ πάροιος.

θηλυδρίαί τε καὶ γυναίμανεῖς ... πόρνους συναγαγόντες συνερίθους καὶ πόρνας, μοιχοὺς τε καὶ μοιχαλίδας, προαγωγούς τε καὶ μαστροπούς, φιλοίνους φάγους πότας ... μαινάδων παῖδας καὶ Διονύσου.

On the surface reading, the reasons for including such a list of insults against the partisans of John is understandable: they serve to deride them and link the usurper to the worst elements of society. However, Mesarites seems to engage in a more complex literary play. Both passages are iambic in their essence. Not only do they include catalogues of abusive terms, but focus on almost every aspect that was within the scope of focus of iambic insult: prodigious appetite for food, drink and sex, effeminacy and the lowest social strata hence pimps, prostitutes as well as addicts of every sort. Giarenis noted that the passages in question are very much in line with Aristophanic aesthetics and the comic/iambic ethos: thence the usage of terms such as *θηλυδρία*, *πόρναι*, or *μοιχός*, all of which have strong connection to the iambic tradition.⁶³⁸

On top of that, in the ancient iambic and comic tradition, fatness was regularly associated with the lowest elements of society and the cheapest prostitutes, who were not even worth one obol. *Suda* is an excellent witness to this mutual connection of *παχεῖα*, social scum and effeminizing appetites. This is attested in its two interrelated entries, one of which reads as follows:

Musachne: a prostitute in Archilochus; and ‘workwoman’ and ‘people’ and ‘fat’. And Hipponax calls her ‘filthy-holed’ and ‘unclean’, [sc. the first of these] from ‘filth’ ... And Anacreon [calls her] ‘one who gives herself to everybody’ and ‘thoroughfare’ and ‘garden-crazy’; for the pubis [is sometimes called] garden.⁶³⁹

It is interesting to note some of the striking thematic similarities between the ideas which surround the prostitutes in the Greek iambic poetry Mesarites’ text. First of all, as can be gleaned from the passages above, one of the prominent features of iambic prostitute is her fatness, *παχεῖα*, and it seems to convey a double meaning. On the one hand, as Suetonius attests in his work *On insults*, *Musachne*’s fatness is caused by her gluttony (διὰ τὸ πολύτροφον).⁶⁴⁰ On the other, the adjective refers to the enormous sexual capacities which were regularly attached to ancient *πορναί*,⁶⁴¹ and both spheres are linked through her

προαγωγούς τε καὶ μαστροπούς, φιλοίνους φάγους πότας, οἶνῳ βεβακχευμένους ἡμέρας τὲ καὶ νυκτός, ἐωλοκρασίας διόλου ἀπόζοντας, μαινάδων παῖδας καὶ Διονύσου. χαμαιλέοντας τούτους εἵποι τις ἂν καιριώτατα, θρασυσπλάγχχνους μὲν εἰ κλίνη τις νῶτα, δειλοκαρδίους δ’ αὖ, εἰ ἐμβριμησάμενός τις τούτων στῆ κατὰ μέτωπον.

⁶³⁷ BERNARD, *Writing and Reading* 285.

⁶³⁸ GIARENIS, “Προσλήψεις” 90. Likewise, the noun *γυναίμανής* is derived from *Iliad* III.39, where it is used by Hector as an insulting epithet directed towards Paris. *θηλυδρία* derives from Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazousae* 131, see also *Suda* α 3822 for the connection of *θηλυδρία* and the iambic tradition.

⁶³⁹ *Suda* μ 1470.

⁶⁴⁰ Suetonius, *On Insults* II.32. Suetonius connects the *πορναί* to animal fat (λίτος).

⁶⁴¹ For the discussion of this particular ‘capability’ of the prostitutes see DAVIDSON, *Courtesans* 176–177.

insatiable γαστήρ. Secondly, the entry in *Suda* mentions two other interesting terms overtly associate the prostitutes to seemingly neutral terms, that is δῆμος and λεωφόρος. Both, however, bear negative connotations and point to the fact that the πορναῖ were deemed to be the 'property of the people' and were used by all.

Mesarites seems to be consciously reusing these iambic interconnections, and John's παχεῖα must have provided him with a perfect opportunity for doing so. His fatness reflects itself in the people whom he surrounds himself with: they symbolize both the unrestrained carnal and 'feminine' appetites of John and project all the ideas which were linked with παχεῖα. Considering the openly deriding tone of both passages, it is tempting to see a possible parallel between the phrase ὁ πολὺς λαός, which is used by Mesarites and the adjectives δῆμος and λεωφόρος, which were used by the iambic poets with reference to the ugliest and most profligate prostitutes. Hence, just as in the tradition of *iambos*, Mesarites associates John's morbid fatness with dirt and filth and for this reason he uses overtly pejorative adjectives συρφετώδης, ἀγελαῖος, ξύγκλυς (the social refuse, the 'common herd' and the 'promiscuous crowd'). Surely, the unbridled bodily appetites of John and his followers are reflected in their greediness for unjust gain: a characteristic feature of each and every foolish individual mocked in the comic and iambic tradition: from the archaic Eurymedon in the Hipponax' mock-verses, through Cleon and the Sausage Seller in the Aristophanic *Knights* to the dim-witted and greedy Strepsiades and Pheidippides in the *Clouds*.

5.4. The Iambic and the Grotesque: The Transmogrified Fat Body

Commenting on the various uses of corporeality in the comic tradition, Worman pointed out that the human body is presented within it as an unnatural object: it is always bulging and gaping, it is characterized by overgrown parts, dismembered joints and monstrously juxtaposed organs. From this vantage point, the comic/iambic body is seemingly close to Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque, characterized by hyperbolic metaphors, excess, exaggeration and unnatural deformation.

A closer look at all the accounts at speeches related to the failed coup instigated by John will allow us to see a seemingly similar bodily aesthetics included within them. Certainly, the presence of the grotesque should not come as surprise. In his work on Rabelais, Bakhtin identified close affinities of the festive and carnivalesque upside-down world with the grotesque elements which constitute the core and heart of Rabelaisian insulting speech. As Worman moreover indicated, a similar interconnection (though ignored by large and far in Bakhtin's framework) can be gleaned from the Athenian Old Comedy, which rose out of the tradition of insulting talk, *iambos*, and drunken festive revelry (κῶμος).⁶⁴²

I have already discussed conspicuously comic tone and elements included in Mesarites' narrative, Choniates' account of the coup as well as Tornikes' speech. This comic air, as I have argued above, is not only sustained by the inclusion of terms and motifs drawn by the authors from the ancient comic and iambic tradition, but also through by the employment of overtly comic literary techniques. To be sure, such a comic 'atmosphere' is most pronounced in Mesarites' narrative, where the entire occurrence is presented in such a way that it looks like a play staged on the scene (σκήνη) or a drunken carousal (κῶμος) in which participated catamites, prostitutes, pimps, gluttons and drunkards.

⁶⁴² WORMAN, *Abusive Mouths* 68.

It is in such a festive surrounding that we can witness a grotesque, transmogrified and monstrous body of the usurper in Mesarites' text. At the same time, all the accounts seem to transform John's body into an enormous bulk of fat and meat and play with the gargantuan weight of the usurper. I have pointed out how Tornikes reduces John to his 'meaty' constitution (κρεωβαρής), or merely to his gigantic weight (πεφορτισμένον μέγαν φόρτον; ἄχθος ἐτώσιον). Mesarites focuses on the very same scene of installment of John on the imperial throne, but unlike in Tornikes' speech, it does not fall into pieces under the heavy bulk of usurper's body:

... they threw him as so much baggage (ἄχθος τι ἐτώσιον), onto the gilded imperial throne, which happened to be there. He was better suited to a bed, or some corner of a room, for they could see that even at the crack of dawn he was breathless and in daze, with no experience of dispensing largesse. Dressed in a tattered robe he was ferried, metaphorically speaking, across the Acheronian Sea; [it took] six stout men, working in relays, who were straining under the weight of his flesh, to carry him in a litter made of strong ropes.⁶⁴³

Several points merit attention in the above passage. First and foremost, the usage of the phrase ἄχθος τι ἐτώσιον in the very same scene and context as it is applied in Tornikes' speech cannot be reduced to a mere coincidence of using a 'common stock of phrases,' as Kazdan postulated in his analysis. What can be seen here is rather an intertextual co-dependence of both authors: both Mesarites and Tornikes play with the image of the gargantuan fatness of the usurper, of throwing his enormous weight on the throne and with his complete unsuitability to be seated upon it and of the imminent death of John. Yet, each of them presents the scene from a different perspective.

Secondly, the iambic and grotesque imagery of John's enthronement is further intensified by the usage of terms drawn from the language of Aristophanes. The bulky body of usurper is presented as being wrapped up in a tattered robe (τεμαχίῳ διερρωγότι ἐντετυλιγμένον), hence in a strikingly similar way to the beggar-monk who performed his mock coronation, who was "wrapped up in a goatskin and a shredded tunic" (ἐγκεκορδυλημένος σισύρα καὶ χιτωνίσκῳ τὸ σύμπαν διερρωγότι). Essentially, both images convey the same meaning, and both refer to the already quoted scene from *Clouds*. As both *Suda* and the scholia to Aristophanic comedy attest, ἐντετυλιγμένος and ἐγκεκορδυλημένος can be used as synonyms. Thus, Mesarites consciously equates the bankrupt stranger-monk with the person of John and emphasizes his monstrous appearance exactly through the usage of the participle ἐντετυλιγμένος. The entry in *Suda* glosses over the term as follows:

Enkekordulemenos: bundled up, covered up and wound up so as not even to present the shape of a human, but to appear as a heap of coverings.⁶⁴⁴

Moreover, the τεμαχίον, literally a tiny sliced piece of material, in which John is swaddled up, is also a term of possible Aristophanic origin. Once again, as another entry in

⁶⁴³ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §8 25.11–18: ... ὡς ἄχθος τι ἐτώσιον ἐπιρρίψας τῇ παρευρεθείσῃ χρυσοπάστῳ ἔδρᾳ βασιλικῇ, τὸν ὡς ἀληθῶς κλίνης ἄξιον καὶ γωνίας, ὃν καὶ κατεῖδον περὶ πρώτας ἀλεκτρυόνων ὥδὰς ἄπνουν, ἀκάρηνον, ἐς ἅπειρα κρεανομηθέντα, τεμαχίῳ διερρωγότι ἐντετυλιγμένον ἐνευλημένον, ἐπὶ κλινιδίου βριαροῖς κάλωσι δεδεμένον, ὑπὸ ἑξ κατὰ διαδοχὰς ἰσαριθμοῖς παχωμίαις ἀνδράσι φερόμενον, ὀκλάζουσι τὰ πολλὰ διὰ τὸ τῶν αὐτοῦ σαρκῶν ἀχθινόν, καὶ πρὸς τὴν Ἀχερουσίαν οἷον διαπορθευόμενον θάλατταν.

⁶⁴⁴ *Suda* ε 86: Ἐγκεκορδυλημένος: ἐντετυλιγμένος, ἐγκεκαλυμμένος καὶ συνεστραμμένος ὥστε μηδ' ἀνθρώπου σχῆμα δηλοῦν ἀλλ' ἐξοχὴν φαίνεσθαι τῶν στρωμάτων.

Suda witnesses, the τέμαχος refers to anything that is sliced, especially fish and meat.⁶⁴⁵ The pun of Mesarites' usage of the term seems to be twofold. On the one hand, it enhances the unnatural and inhumane appearance of John, who looked rather like an enormous bulk of flesh, that was bundled up in a heap of sliced rags than an actual human being. On the other, Mesarites seems to refer as well to the looming death of John: as we shall see, his enormous beheaded corpus was cut into quarters and dismembered by the soldiers of emperor Alexios III.

Finally, the passage refers to an already familiar image, which was present in Choniates' portrayal of Theodore Kastamonites and the coincidence of the motifs used by both authors is interesting. Just as Theodore, due to the sickness caused by his morbid fatness, John was unable to move on his own and had to be in a little bed made of strong ropes (ἐπὶ κλινιδίου βριαροῖς κάλωσι δεδεμένον). Mesarites seems to be pointing to an image like the one used by Choniates in his presentation of Kastamonites, who was carried over in a folding chair (ὀκλαδία). Moreover, the diminutive term κλινιδίον, which is employed by Mesarites, has an intimate connection to the comic tradition: *Suda* not only links the noun to Aristophanic comedies, but also indicates that it refers to a 'beggarly little bed.'⁶⁴⁶ Once more Mesarites reaches out to the comic material to deride and reveal the real nature of the usurper and once again he manages to achieve the comic effect by a 'paradoxical' juxtaposition of a heavy bulk of John's body which is transported by six men, who squat under the weight of a 'tiny little bed.' What matters here as well is the degrading (hence lying or 'folded') position of John's body: it would not be fitting to any emperor, to be thrown and bundled into a small bed and carried around in it.

At another times John's gargantuan body is reduced to a monstrous and naked bundle of flesh and fat. Such an iambic and grotesque transmogrification of John's body is present in Choniates, who presents the usurper as stuffed with meat (κρεωβριθής), or in Tornikes; speech, where John does not seem to possess any bodily organs but is rather 'laden with meat' (κρεωβάρης). By the same token, such a monstrous presentation is also present in Mesarites' narrative: the spies who were sent to the palace by George Oinaïotes witnessed a motley and undistinguishable crowd which filled the palace. They could discern John only because he seemed to be flesh in itself (διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν σάρκα). Instead of a human body he appeared to have been a gigantic sack of flesh and instead of any bodily armour, he seemed to have been using his flesh only:

The spies we dispatched a while ago have not taken their time or tarried; they have not been entertained by the likes of Rahab the harlot (πορνή) ... for they have passed through the gate they entered and have returned to us. They were only able to distinguish John the Fat *because he was pure flesh* (διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν σάρκα). He wasn't wearing a breastplate; he had no bodyguards and few supporters; around him were a mob of revelers and a crowd of sycophants. Some smelt of stale alcohol, others were seen vomiting into wine jars, some were skimming off revenues.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ *Suda* τ 295: Τεμάχη: ἐπὶ κρεῶν καὶ ἰχθύων καὶ ἐπὶ πλακούντων, ἐπὶ δὲ πσιῶν οὐκέτι. Ἀριστοφάνης Νεφέλαις: κεστρῶν τεμάχη μεγάλων. ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων, οἷον τυροῦ, τόμος. ἢ εὐθεῖα τὸ τέμαχος. Also see Aristophanes, *Clouds* 339; *Knights* 283.

⁶⁴⁶ *Suda* κ 1809: Κλίνις ... καὶ κλινίδιον ὑποκοριστικῶς; *Suda* α 4161 ... ἡ μικρὰ κλίνη, τὸ πτωχὸν κλινίδιον.

⁶⁴⁷ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §25 43.20–31: τὴν γὰρ ἦν εἰσέδυσαν πύλην δι' ἐκείνης διώδευσαν καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς γεγόνασι παλιμπόρευτοι. καὶ σαρκοφόρος μόνον ὁ Ἰωάννης τούτοις ὥράθη διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν σάρκα, οὐ θωρακοφόρος, οὐ σιδηρόκρανος, γυμνὸς ὑπασπιστῶν, ἐπικούρων ἐψιλωμένος, χορὸς κραιπαλώντων περὶ αὐτόν, χορὸς νευσταζόντων τὸ κάρα. ὁ μὲν ἐωλοκρασίας ἀπόζει, ἄτερος πιθάκνας ὅλας ὁρᾶται ἐμμηκῶς· ὁ μὲν

Of course, there is a compelling logic behind this identification of the usurper with his flesh. After all, in the Christian tradition σάρξ was identified as the ultimate source of sin, hence the reduction of John's body to his σάρξ pointed to his completely sinful nature. More than that, the juxtaposition of the adjectives θωρακοφόρος (wearing a breastplate), σιδηρόκρανος (lit. with a helmet on his head), which refer to the military tradition, with σαρκοφόρος. Instead of wearing a proper 'manly' armour as the situation demanded, John protects himself only with his sinful flesh. It is also interesting to note how the monstrosity of John's body is further enhanced in the passage through the references to the idea of nakedness. Not only does he seem to be a pure mass of flesh, he also lies there naked, 'stripped' of shield-bearers (γυμνός ὑπασπιστῶν) and stripped bare of his allies (ἐπικούρων ἐψιλωμένος).⁶⁴⁸ This naked, sinful and carnal atmosphere which prevailed among John and his supporters is neatly rounded up by the reference to the biblical harlot from *Joshua* 2:3 as well as by the iambically inspired themes of drunken revelry (χόρος κραυπαλώτων), emitting the breath heavy with the smell of alcohol, and vomiting into wine-jars (πιθάκνας ὅλας ἐμημεκώς).⁶⁴⁹

5.5. *The Sickly and Degenerating Iambic Body*

One of the characteristic features of the iambic/grotesque body is its 'openness.' Unlike classical self-enclosed bodies, it is a loose, detached and uncontained entity, which leaks, outflows, possesses detachable members and organs. As Bachtin and Boyarin pointed out, the grotesque always revolves around the themes of life and death, illness and degradation.⁶⁵⁰ In the previous chapters of this thesis, I have attempted to show how such sickly iambic or grotesque sickliness was employed in Psellos' invective against Jacob, or in Choniates' *History*. In both instances, it served the very same purpose: it added significantly to the derisive tone of the texts while also the sickly physiology served as a marker of the socially dangerous behavioural types.

Without any doubt, the sources which revolve around John's coup operate with such a grotesque sickliness. Tornikes is rather short in his treatment of John's sickly body: he mentions it once and does so only in passing in the section of the speech related to his enthronement. Once the monstrous body of John was pushed into the palace quarters, he was constantly and heavily panting (τὰ πολλὰ καὶ ἀσθμαίνοντα). Mesarites and Choniates, however, are much more explicit than that. The first one hints in numerous places throughout his λόγος ἀφηγηματικός at John's ill health: already at the break of dawn he seemed completely breathless (περὶ πρώτας ἀλεκτρυόνων ὥδ' ἄπνουν)⁶⁵¹; he breaths heavily and

εἰσόδους ἐκκαρποῦται, ἄλλος οἰκίας προνομεύει· ἐξ ἡτιμωμένου καὶ τεθνεώτος ὅσον ἤδη κατὰ ταυτηνὴ τὴν ὥραν ἕτερος δέχεται τὰς τιμὰς.' Translation modified by myself (italics).

⁶⁴⁸ Both terms, γυμνός and ψιλωμένος convey essentially the very same idea of 'stripping bare.'

⁶⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the rare phrase πιθάκνας ὅλας might have been drawn by Mesarites from Choniates' *History*: it appears in the already discussed portrayal of John Kamateros and the πιθάκναι are the casks which the foreign kings (with whom Kamateros enjoys spending his time) empty directly into their bellies. Cf. the letter of the late Byzantine scholar, John Chortasmenos, who quotes directly Choniates' passage in Chortasmenos, *Letters* 47: οὐ γὰρ πιθάκνας ὅλας οἴνου μεταγγίζειν εἰς τὴν γαστέρα δεῖ τῷ τοιούτῳ ἢ φιλοτησίας αὐτῷ προπίνειν σκύφον ἐπιδιδόντα τὸν Ἡρακλέους, ἀλλὰ παλάθῃ σύκων ἐκάστης ἡμέρας καὶ μέλιτος ἡμιαμφόριον ἀποχρήσουσιν αὐτῷ πρὸς τροφήν.

⁶⁵⁰ D. BOYARIN, "The Great Fat Massacre: Sex, Death and the Grotesque Body in the Talmud," in *People of the Body*, H. Eilberg-Schwartz (ed.), Albany 1992, 69–100 at 73.

⁶⁵¹ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §8 25.13.

drips with sweat (συχνὰ πνευστιῶν, ἰδρῶτι περιρρεόμενος),⁶⁵² or barely catches the air and appears almost half-dead (τοῦτον ἄπνουν ἑώρακα καὶ ἡμθνήτα σχεδόν).⁶⁵³

Two mutually related passages, one from Mesarites' *Narrative*, the other from Choniates' *History* are of interest here. The first one appears in the concluding section of Mesarites' text: the imperial army is already the palace, while John sits in his drunken stupor in the Chrysotriklinos, the main reception hall within the complex of the Great Palace in Constantinople. Surely, it is not at all a coincidence that the scene occurs within Mesarites' narrative in this exact place. In the vivid ekphrasis which directly precedes it,⁶⁵⁴ Nicholas explains that the building itself and its lavish decorations were not of Roman origin, but of Persian design and were embellished with the representations of richly clad Persians.⁶⁵⁵ Indeed, it was John's grandfather, John Axouch, who commissioned the adornment of Chrysotriklinos and it was most probably related to the official visit of Kilij Arslan in Constantinople in 1161.⁶⁵⁶ It is exactly this Persian 'tent' or 'stage-set' that Mesarites has in mind. Wearing his actor's band wrapped around his head, John is sitting on the ground:

... [it] symbolised the unbearable weight of disaster, which had overtaken the wretched man. He took great gulps of wine (ἀναρροφῶντα πυκνὰ) as he greeted the Persians pictured in the walls of the building and raised a toast to them. He was drenched in sweat (πολλῶ περ ἰδρῶτι καταρρεόμενον), which he wiped away with a towel, every so often flicking it away with the crook of his finger. He was already drifting off into sleep to the point that it was almost impossible to wake him up.⁶⁵⁷

I have already discussed throughout this thesis some of the motifs which are present in the above passage: the constant slurping of wine, the linkage of unbridled drunkenness and politically/socially threatening individual, consumption in animal-like and challenged position (ἐφιζημένον χαμαί) and the sick, degenerating, outflowing consumptive body. Surely, all these also appear in the related excerpt from Choniates' *History*, which seems to be even more puzzling. The author of the *History* does not specify the exact place where the scene occurred and, he does not focus on John's 'barbaric' ancestry. The focal point of the passage is rather John's bodily excess:

When the night had come, John did not care, as it seems, either to set the night vigils, or to raise up the overthrown gates, but he was seated (καθιστάμενος) as if no danger [had been coming] and there was no one to oppose him. Because he was laden with meat (οἷα κρεωβριθής), he was suffering from constant thirst and, emptying the entire jars of water (ὑδατος ὅλα κεράμια ἐκκενῶν) he poured out its gushes just like a dolphin (κατὰ δελφίνας ἀναφυσῶν) and he rub off sweat (ἀπέψα τοὺς ἰδρῶτας) which trickled away as

⁶⁵² Ibid. §7 23.31–32.

⁶⁵³ Ibid. §11 28.10–11.

⁶⁵⁴ For the use of ekphrasis in Mesarites' work see ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 42.

⁶⁵⁵ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §27 44.34–36 οὐ Ῥωμαῖδος, οὐ Σικελικῆς, οὐ Κελτίβηρος, οὐ Συβαριτικῆς, οὐ Κυπρίου, οὐ Κίλικος· Περσικῆς μὲν οὖν, ὅτι καὶ ιδέας φέρει Περσῶν παραλλαγὰς τε στολῶν.

⁶⁵⁶ For this see ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 69 n. 105 with a relevant bibliography on the subject.

⁶⁵⁷ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §28 45.12–18: ἐφιζημένον χαμαί, σύμβολον τοῦτο τοῦ κατειληφóτος τὸν ἄθλιον πάθους καὶ τοῦ ἀφορήτου τῆς συμφορᾶς, ἀναρροφῶντα πυκνὰ καὶ τοῖς ἐγγεγραμμένοις τῷ δόμῳ Πέρσαις χαριζόμενόν τε καὶ τούτοις προπίνοντα, πολλῶ περ ἰδρῶτι καταρρεόμενον καὶ διὰ χειρο μάκτρου ποτέ μὲν τὸν ἰδρῶτα ἐκμάσσοντα, ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ ὑπ' ἀγκύλῳ τῷ δακτύλῳ τοῦτον ἐκσφενδονοῦντα μακράν, ἤδη δὲ πρὸς ὕπνον τραπῆναι μέλλοντα ἐγγὺς ἀδιύπνιστον.

if from a spring and evaporated with the [scourging] heat [produced by his body].”⁶⁵⁸

The similarity of the motifs in the passages from Mesarites and Choniates is interesting: both present John’s unnatural and grotesque constitution of the body from a slightly different perspective but using similar of phrases. Furthermore, both Mesarites and Choniates refer to the comic and sympotic motif of the excessive consumption of wine and water directly from enormous vessels. Choniates once again modifies this well-known comic motif: here, it does not only emphasize the enormous capacities of John’s belly, and presents a typical pattern of behavior of drunkards and gluttons, but also enhances his grotesque sickness. Unlike in Mesarites’ *Narrative*, in the passage from Choniates’ *History* John’s monstrous body is not only drenched with sweat, it gushes (or vomits) fountains of it like a dolphin. The image is startling, but Choniates might have had in his mind a very particular set of mutually related ideas. According to the ancient and medieval Greek physiognomic tradition, the men of watery nature were deemed to be exceedingly fond of women (φιλογύναιοι) and effeminate (θηλυγόνιοι), as they were supposedly prone to beget daughters rather than sons. They were moreover characterized by their lasciviousness (λαγνεία), as they were always thinking about coitus (περὶ τὰ ἥθη ἐρωτικοὶ ἀειμνήμονες).⁶⁵⁹ Of course, πορνεία and λαγνεία have always been related to the beastly urges of γαστήρ.

The plausibility of such a reading is further strengthened by the symbolism and meaning of dolphin in ancient Greek culture. As I have pointed out in the first chapter, dolphins were regularly associated with womb and primeval chaos out of which the world emerged, for this reason the Greek noun δέλφις (dolphin) was equated with another term δέλφυς (womb).⁶⁶⁰ Hence, the fish is clearly associated both with something that was inherently monstrous on the one hand, and with the dangerous space of the belly/womb (νηδύς/γαστήρ), the seat of all uncontrollable appetites. From this vantage point then, it does seem understandable why Choniates chose to mention this species of fish: it works as an epitome of everything John Komnenos ‘the Fat’ was.

5.6. The Dismembered Iambic Body: Chopping up the Monster

Following Worman and Bachtin, I have stressed that in the grotesque discursive scheme of *iambos* the human body is not only unnaturally transformed, but also regularly dismembered while its dismembered parts are infused with symbolic/metonymic significance. Unquestionably, the act of actual of John’s decapitation allowed the authors to expand and elaborate on this theme: in all accounts, primary focus changes between the beheaded gargantuan body and the neckless monstrous head of the usurper.

⁶⁵⁸ Niketas Choniates, *History* 526.26–527.3: Νυκτὸς δ’ ἐπιούσης οὔτε τῆς φρουρᾶς, ὡς ἔδει, τῶν ἀρχείων ὁ Ἰωάννης ἐφρόντισεν, οὔτε τὰς ἀνατραπείσας πύλας ἀνέστησεν, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐν τῷ ἀσφαλεῖ καθιστάμενος καὶ μηδένα ἔχων ἤδη τὸν ἀνθιστάμενον κατὰ δελφίνας ἀναφυσῶν καὶ ὕδατος ὅλα κεράμια ἐκκενῶν, δίψει συνεχόμενος οἷα κρεωβριθῆς, ἀπέψα τοὺς ἰδρωτάς κρουνηδὸν ἀποστάζοντας καὶ θερμὸν ἀπατμίζοντας. Cf. Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §27 44.18–19 on the lack of the palace guards: Ἦνευγμένα τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦδε τὰ τῶν ἀνακτόρων θύρετρα καὶ ἀφύλακτα, ὁ Ἰουστινιάνειος τρίκλινος γεγυμνωμένος ἀνδρῶν.

⁶⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Physiognomonics* 808a.34–808b.6: ἐλεήμονες ὅσοι γλαφυροὶ καὶ λευκόχροοι καὶ λιπαρόμματοι καὶ τὰ ρινία ἄνωθεν διεξυσμένοι, καὶ αἰὲ δακρύουσιν. οἱ αὐτοὶ οὗτοι καὶ φιλογύναιοι καὶ θηλυγόνιοι καὶ περὶ τὰ ἥθη ἐρωτικοὶ καὶ ἀειμνήμονες καὶ εὐφυεῖς καὶ ἔνθερμοι and further on the signs of lustfulness: λάγνου σημεῖα. λευκόχρως καὶ ... λιπαρὸν τὸ ὁμμάτιον καὶ μάργον.

⁶⁶⁰ *Suda* δ 211 Δελφύς: μήτρα. ἔνθεν ἀδελφός. ὁ ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς μήτρας and *Suda* ν 301: Νηδύς: γαστήρ, μήτρα.

Mesarites is playing with John's gory dismemberment at length and mentions it several times in his narrative even prior to the actual act of beheading. In the opening section of his narrative, Mesarites states that the purpose of his work is to lay down the sequence of events, which finally led to the decapitation of this blockhead (τούτου παράφρων ἀποδειροτόμητο κεφαλῇ).⁶⁶¹ After describing the 'mock coronation' episode, Mesarites continues to compare the pitiful crown, which was placed on John's head to the sickle of Zachariah, which cuts off the heads of the sinners.⁶⁶² Indeed, even while he was still alive, John seemed to have been completely devoid of his own head (ἀκάρηνος).⁶⁶³ The most vivid example of such an authorial game comes in the scene in which Mesarites describes what he purportedly saw through his own eyes once he entered the Triklinios hall in the Great Palace, where John installed him on the throne. Kazdan pointed out that the description is unparalleled in the entire history of Byzantine literature.⁶⁶⁴ Mesarites not only shows John from the back (which is an unusual perspective, unprecedented in other Byzantine literary works), but also he focuses on an utterly unnatural constitution of John's body: his overgrown, great and fat shoulders (ὤμους πιμελεῖς τε καὶ ὑπερόγκους); his swollen and chunky back (μετάφρενα διωδηκότα τε καὶ κατάσαρκα), and the faceless head which was hanging loosely from the neck, almost as if it had been already detached from it:

I entered the Triklinios of Justinian and looked around. I saw the head, crown, and small of the back of the new emperor. My entrance had been from behind which prevented me from seeing his face. His hair was coarse and dyed black; his shoulders were blubbery and bulky which was a family trait passed down to him from his ancestors. Paunchy and pot-bellied he was a useless burden on the imperial throne. Approaching a little closer I stood on the right and saw that he was hardly breathing and scarcely alive. He was so weak and exhausted that he made no effort to answer any questions put to him. His head was hanging down. I thought this presaged that his feeble head would not stay long on his shoulders but cut off would roll swiftly along the ground as if incapable of supporting the responsibilities of kingship.⁶⁶⁵

The passage is a very good illustration of the reasons behind focusing on the head of the usurper, which is used (and by no means solely by Mesarites) as a symbol that works on several levels of signification. The symbolic 'lack of head' is merely yet another sign of stupidity, hence the trait characteristic to the fat and gluttonous individuals, whose one and only passion is filling their gut with food and drink. At the very same time, this grotesque headlessness points to the complete lack of self-agency in John's action. Once again, what Mesarites puns at through building the imagery around the lack of head, is the fact that the

⁶⁶¹ Nicholas Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §1 20.1–2.

⁶⁶² Ibid. §6 22.31–32.

⁶⁶³ Ibid. §8 25.13.

⁶⁶⁴ KAZDAN–FRANKLIN, *Studies* 251.

⁶⁶⁵ Nicholas Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §11 28.3–17: καὶ περὶ τὸν Ἰουστινιάνειον τρίκλινον εἰσεληλυθὼς ἀτενίσας τεθέσθαι κεφαλὴν τε καὶ στέφανον νῶτα τε καὶ μετάφρενα τοῦ νέου βασιλέως ἐκείνου—ἡ γὰρ μοι εἴσοδος κατὰ νώτου τούτῳ ἐτύγχανεν, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ τὸ ἐκείνου πρόσωπον ἰδεῖν ἀπεκώλυε—τρίχας τε τετανυσμένας μελαντέρας τε καὶ τραχείας, καταλλήλους τῷ ἐκ πάππων ἐπ' αὐτὸν κατιόντι γένει, ὤμους πιμελεῖς τε καὶ ὑπερόγκους, μετάφρενα διωδηκότα τε καὶ κατάσαρκα, τοῦ βασιλικοῦ ἐκείνου θρόνου ἄχθος ἐτώσιον, προγάστορα καὶ προκοίλιον. ἐγγίσας οὖν τούτῳ ἔστην ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ τοῦτον ἄπνουν ἐώρακα καὶ ἡμηνῆτα οὖν τούτῳ ἔστην ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ τοῦτον ἄπνουν ἐώρακα καὶ ἡμηνῆτα σχεδόν, πρὸς τὰς ἐρωτήσεις ἄρτιον μὴ φθεγγόμενον, ἀλλὰ συγκεκομμένον καὶ ἀσθενές. ἡ κεφαλὴ τούτου τὸ σύμπαν κατωβαρής. ἐναργές δε τοῦτο σημεῖον ἐδόκει μοι, ὥς οὐ σταίη ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦδε τὸ ἐκείνου ἀμενηνέστατον κάρηνον, ἀλλ' ἐκκοπὲν πεζεύσει ταχύτατα οἷα μὴ τὸν τῆς ἀληθοῦς βασιλείας δεδυνημένον ὑπαυχενίζειν ζυγόν.

entire usurpation was steered from behind the curtains, while the fat member of the Komnenoi family was a figurehead and a smokescreen that was put to the fore to misdirect the public as to who the real driving force behind the entire occurrence was.

More than that, the usurper's head, which is presented by Mesarites as almost separated from the body, stands as a sign of John's outright lack of any competence to assume the imperial throne. From all the accounts of the coup it is Mesarites, who draws and expands on this interconnection most extensively. Throughout the narrative John is either mute or utters some indistinctive sounds which does not even seem to be emitted by his organ of voice. Again, this is used by Mesarites as an indication of John's passivity and subordinacy. Instead of leading, imposing verbal orders and ruling he always seems to be acted upon. He is dragged by his followers, tossed like a useless bundle, transported on a bed, ridden on the horseback or seated on the floor. This speechlessness only rounds this theme of John's inactivity. Mesarites expresses it more fully in the subsequent description of what happened once he himself approached the gargantuan monster, who was mounted on the imperial throne. Nicholas narrates how he attempted to address the newly acclaimed 'emperor' in order to flag to him that the imperial soldiers were urgently needed at the church of the Mother of God. They were required to guard off the rabble from stealing the most holy relics stored in there. Mesarites relates how he started speaking at low voice at first, then he began to pitch up his voice, only to end up yelling at the headless bulk of fat which occupied the throne:

Fixing my gaze on him, I addressed him indistinctly under my breath (ὑπεφώνησα), but he didn't hear anything I said. I spoke up more loudly (ἀνεβόησα), but he still wouldn't acknowledge me. I yelled at him (κατεβοώμην), because he was completely inert and speechless (ἀνεπαισθήτου καὶ ἀναύδου τὸ παντελές) ... Having bent his neck slightly, he muttered in a low indistinct voice, as though he was breathing his last, that there was a lack of guards ... Being in a prophetic frame of mind ... I wondered what the poor wretch would do if somebody accosted him at night or at twilight and assault his head with fear (φόβον ἐπισείσοι τούτου τῇ κεφαλῇ)? He would completely lose his head (ἀπαυχενισθείη). Just a shout, an insolent rebuke, or a brutal and violent encounter would be enough to make him give up the ghost.⁶⁶⁶

It is interesting how Mesarites juxtaposes his own verbal actions, whose intensity gradually grows from silent speech to shouting (ὑπεφώνησα / ἀνεβόησα / κατεβοώμην), with John's absolute silence and lack of action. At last, after repeated attempt there occurs some reaction on the part of the usurper, but Mesarites is careful enough to underscore John's monstrous features. The usurper does not seem to possess any head at all, or any organ of speech through which he could even articulate words, hence he is pictured whilst bending his neck (μόλις τὸν αὐχένα παρεκνεύσας). He did not even try to move his head, which was

⁶⁶⁶ Nicholas Mesarites, *Narrative of the coup* §11 28.20–37: τούτῳ ἐπεντρανίσας ἀμυδρὸν ὑπεφώνησα κάτωθεν, οὗτος δ' οὐκ ἠνωτίσατό μου τὸ σύνολον· γεγωνότερον ἀνεβόησα, καὶ οὐδ' οὕτως ἐπαῖειν μου ἤθελε· κατεβοώμην τούτου ὡς ἀνεπαισθήτου καὶ ἀναύδου τὸ παντελές ... μόλις οὖν τὸν αὐχένα παρεκνεύσας μικρὸν ἐρημίαν ἔχειν φυλάκων ... εἴ τι προφητικὸς ἐγὼ ... τί καὶ δράσει, εἰ τεταλαιπωρημένῳ νύκτερος ἢ καὶ ἀκροκνεφῶς ἐπισταίη τις καὶ φόβον ἐπισείσοι τούτου τῇ κεφαλῇ; πάντως ἀπαυχενισθείη καὶ ἀπὸ μόνης βοῆς καὶ ἀπ' ἐμβριμήματος θαρσαλέου, καὶ βλοσυρωτάτου καὶ ὀρμητικωτάτου τοῦ συναντήματος ἐκρήξειε τὴν ψυχὴν. English translation by Angold amended by me, see the note below.

loosely connected to his monstrous body.⁶⁶⁷ This is consistent with the ‘headless’ imagery explored by Tornikes throughout the passage which is densely used towards its end. In the last two sentences quoted above, Mesarites plays again with the image of the almost non-existent link between the huge body of John and his head, thence the humorous picture of assaulting his head with fear and of cutting off by the neck (ἀπαυχενισθείη). Not only do they allow the author to emphasize again and again the unnatural, monstrous constitution of the usurper’s body but also enable him to explore the symbolic significance of the head, as an organ responsible for thought and speech.

It therefore becomes more intelligible why the mouth, an organ which stands at the core of the iambic insult, is absent from the accounts of the coup. Instead of concentrating on the yapping mouth and its abusive behaviours, the iambic features of the accounts of the coup lean towards the monstrous and the grotesque, towards the bodily dismemberment and the abnormal, fat bodily structure. Without a doubt, John’s factual decapitation, which was perpetrated by the soldiers of Alexios III, as well as his morbidly obese body helped the authors to explore this iambic bodily detachment.

Indeed, both Chrysoberges and Tornikes label John as an ‘Empedoclean monster’ (τέρας Ἐμπεδόκλειον, Ἐμπεδόκλεια τέρατα). The meaning and the tradition behind these phrases is interesting and it fits in particularly well with the dismembered and monstrous iambic imagery. The notion of the ‘Empedoclean monster’ is derived from the philosophical tradition and it is preserved in Aristotle’s *On the Heavens* as well as in *On the Generation of Animals*.⁶⁶⁸ According to Empedocles in the primeval state of the world there existed only the dismembered joints, faces without necks (κόρσαι ἀναύχενες), arms which wandered bereaved of shoulders (γυμνοὶ ... βραχίονες εὐνιδες ὤμων), eyes that moved aimlessly without foreheads (ὄμματά ... πενητεύοντα μετώπων).⁶⁶⁹ Moreover, as a result of the sole activity of Strife unmixed with Love, there sprang many monstrous creatures, with faces on both sides (ἀμφιπρόσωπα .. ἀμφίστερνα), with oxen heads and the corpus of man (ἀνδροφυῆ βούκρανα) and vice versa, or creatures which were composed of male and female parts.⁶⁷⁰

Chrysoberges, on his part, does not dwell excessively on such an Empedoclean imagery. He constructs a set of images which reconfigure John’s σῶμα to the ‘puffed up cedar of Lebanon’ (Λιβάνου κέδρος φυσώμενος)⁶⁷¹ which was cut down by the tree-cutting hands of the emperor (ὑπὸ δρυοκόποις χέρσι) and whose enormous body, laid on the ground ‘mighty in its mightiness’ (μέγας ἔκειτο μεγαλωσί),⁶⁷² then he clarifies that John was rather similar to an Empedoclean monster, whose frightful neckless head and headless neck succumbed to the imperial blades.⁶⁷³ Tornikes, on the other hand, builds up significantly on

⁶⁶⁷ I am not certain whether Angold’s translation (“with a feeble nod of his head”) fully captures the pun on John’s heedlessness: the original text only mentions the slight movement of the neck (μόλις οὖν τὸν αὐχένα παρεκνεύσας).

⁶⁶⁸ Aristotle, *On the Heavens* III 2.

⁶⁶⁹ Empedocles, *Fragments* B 57: ἤι πολλὰ μὲν κόρσαι ἀναύχενες ἐβλάστησαν, / γυμνοὶ δ’ ἐπλάζοντο βραχίονες εὐνιδες ὤμων, / ὄμματά τ’ οἷ(α) ἐπλανᾶτο πενητεύοντα μετώπων.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid. B 61: πολλὰ μὲν ἀμφιπρόσωπα καὶ ἀμφίστερνα φύεσθαι, / βουγενῆ ἀνδρόπρωιρα, τὰ δ’ ἔμπαλιν ἐξανατέλλειν / ἀνδροφυῆ βούκρανα, μεμειγμένα τῇ μὲν ἀπ’ ἀνδρῶν / τῇ δὲ γυναικοφυῇ σκιεροῖς ἡσκημένα γυίοις.

⁶⁷¹ I shall discuss the meaning of this phrase in the upcoming section of this chapter.

⁶⁷² Chrysoberges, *Speech* I 5.1–7. Cf. *Iliad* 16.776.

⁶⁷³ Chrysoberges, *Speech* I 5.8–10: ἢ μᾶλλον τέρας ἦν εὐθύς Ἐμπεδόκλειον εἰς κόρσιν τεράστιον ἀναύχενον καὶ εἰς αὐχένα πάλιν ἀκόρσωτον ὑπὸ τυραννοκτόνοις σπάθαις σου δοισαθείς.

Empedoclean material, and deepens the monstrous image constructed in Chrysoberges' speech:

Dismembered in this way by all sorts and kinds of swords, and [exactly] where he fell in the chamber of the imperial palace, "his head was mingled with the dust;" *with his own spear you pierced his head.*⁶⁷⁴ It flew to the ground and it rolled to the pit of Hades ... One could see a neckless head, and a headless neck, these Empedoclean monsters, a head which was not only hateful to look at, but also [so] ugly so that it made the ones looking at it earnestly turn their look away and quickly close their eyelids. But to those who chanced upon it, they spoke of it straight away as if it had been a gorgon's head, and the remaining 'tale' of his body was lying there, enormous and huge, torn in pieces *like the broken earth which has been plowed...*⁶⁷⁵

The imagery of the passage is dense, and the act of beheading is colored with quotation from Homer and the Old Testament and all of them serve similar purpose. They underline the brutality of John's final fate and emphasize the role of the emperor who, just like God, delivers his subjects from evil and destroys the apostates. The monstrosity of John is further accentuated by the reference to the frightful sight of John's severed head, which resembled not only the grotesque Empedoclean monster, but also the dreadful gorgon. Indeed, Tornikes seems to be revolving around the notion of *ἐκπληξις*, a feeling of awe incited by the appearance of gorgon's head, the very same which Jacob stirred in the audience in Psellos' invective. The spiteful remnant of John's body seems to have stirred the very same reaction: they were so sickening and fascinating at the very same time that no one could restrain themselves not to look on them. More than that, the introduction of the gorgon-like imagery might play an additional role: as I have shown in the chapter one, the folkloric and magical tradition clearly linked the gorgon's head with all the dangers which were posed by γαστήρ. In fact, as we I have already shown, *gorgoneion*, hence the awe-inspiring hissing head surrounded by snakes stood as a symbol of the beastly belly which was supposed to be tamed by specially devised magical formulas. It is possible that Tornikes himself was aware of this highly popular tradition and hence might have used the image of gorgon with a very clear intent in his mind: after all the belly and fatness form the axis of the literary presentation of John.

Just like in Tornikes' speech, in Choniates' and Mesarites' narratives we can glimpse of John's actual countenance only after his head has been decapitated by the soldiers of Alexios III: up to this point he is consistently presented as being faceless and (almost) headless. In the same vein and similarly to Tornikes, Choniates offers a condensed yet graphic insight into the gory execution of John. Once the imperial troops engaged in a short clash with John's partisans, they easily captured the usurper himself and slaughtered him like a sacrificial beast (ὡς βόσκημα), and:

⁶⁷⁴ *Habakkuk* 3:14.

⁶⁷⁵ Tornikes, *Speech* I §15 68.9–21: Οὕτω γοῦν παντοίοις ξίφεσι μελιζόμενος, αὐτοῦ ποῦ κατέπεσεν ἐπὶ τοῦ δώματος τοῦ βασιλικοῦ, «τοῦ καὶ φθεγγομένοιο κάρη κονίησιν ἐμίχθη·» ἐν ἐκστάσει γὰρ ἡ τούτου κεφαλὴ διεκόπτετο καὶ πρὸς γῆν ἐφίπτετο καὶ πρὸς ἄδου βάραθρον ἐσφαιρίζετο. Ὁ κατὰ τοῦ δεσπότης τραχηλιάσας αὐχὴν ἐξεκόπτετο, ἐσπαθίζοντο δὲ καὶ πόδες, οἷ, τῆς εὐθείας καὶ βασιλικῆς ἐκτραπέντες ὁδοῦ, πρὸς τὸ τῆς βασιλείας ὕψος ὀλισθηρῶς ὑπανέδραμον καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν κόρησιν μὲν ἀναύχενά, αὐχένα δ' ἀκόρσωτον, ταῦτα δὲ τὰ ἐμπεδόκλεια τέρατα, κεφαλὴν οὐ μόνον εἰδεχθῆ τε καὶ μυσαρὰν ἀποστρέφειν τε τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ ταχὺ τὰ βλέφαρα μύειν τοὺς εἰς αὐτὴν ἀτενίζοντας ἀναπειθούσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ φοβερὰν τοῖς ὑπαντιάζουσι καὶ οἶαν ἄντικρυς τὴν τῆς Γοργόνης μυθεύουσι, τὸν δὲ γε λοιπὸν ὅλκον τοῦ σώματος, ἥν τε μέγαν τε κείμενον, κατερραγμένον ἐπ' ἐδάφους ὡσεὶ πάχος. The last sentence is a direct quotation from *Psalms* 140:7.

... inflicting blows all over his body, then having cut away his head, they brought it to the emperor. Then, still vomiting blood, grinning terribly with both eyes shut, it was suspended in the arch in the agora for the public view. The remaining parts of John [i.e. his huge corpus] was lifted upon the open bed,⁶⁷⁶ and placed at the southern gate of the Blachernai palace.⁶⁷⁷

As can be seen the above passage, Choniates does not mention overtly the likeness of John's head, yet the image is clear enough. The head of the monster terrified the spectators even after it was cut off from the enormous bulk of its body. Choniates operates here with the familiar iambic imagery, which serves to underscore what monstrosity of a man John was. The severed head spewed forth, or indeed vomited, torrents of blood and gaped with its lips and teeth wide open (σέσηρυῖα δεινόν).⁶⁷⁸ Just like in other instances, the vomiting mouth and the wide-yawning jaw stand as clear paragons of dangerous, aggressive and even murderous individual who needed to be erased from the society.

Mesarites pushed this monstrous imagery even one step further: since he has already elaborated quite extensively on John's beheading prior to his execution, he chose to present the death of the gargantuan usurper from a quite different perspective. As the literary tradition commanded, John had to suffer death which was fitting to the apostate: the bulk of John's body, still alive, was brought before the emperor and condemned to death and one of the soldiers from the imperial troops slashed his entrails with a double-edged sword (ἀμφικώπῳ σπάθῃ τὰς λαγόνας αὐτοῦ ἐξεκέντησε). Upon this, the usurper's enormous body fell on the ground, whilst his guts were pouring out through the cut. Lying there lifeless on the ground, with severed head, John's fleshy body, ready to be dismembered, seemed like a gigantic dish which was prepared by the cooks for the all-devouring Hades:

There were master butchers among the soldiery, who followed the footsteps of Nebur-azdan.⁶⁷⁹ They kept slashing his body and chopping it for Hades; they carved him up as an offering for Persephone, Ajax, Pluto even if Hades alone refused to feast upon such a body. O! Who is there that can weave such flesh on to bones, like weft across the warp? O! Who is there that can encase sinews within a protective layer of fat?⁶⁸⁰

5.7. Popping out the Swollen Balloon of Meat

Before I turn to the concluding section of this chapter, I would like to focus on another set of images shared (with some degree of modification) by all the authors of the accounts. They are directly connected to John's death, continue and round up the iambic/monstrous aesthetics

⁶⁷⁶ Once again, the phrase κλίνης αἴθριος seems to be intertextually connected to Mesarites' description of John, who was, in Nicholas' eyes, better suited to a bed: κλίνης ἄξιος.

⁶⁷⁷ Niketas Choniates *History* 527.14–23: Οἱ μὲν οὖν πλοίων ἐπέβησαν καὶ τῇ ἀκτῇ προσίσχουσι τῆς μονῆς τῶν Ὀδηγῶν κάκειθεν τοῖς πελεκυφόροις συμμίγνυνται τοῦ βασιλέως ὑπασπισταῖς· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἦν ὀπλοφόρους διὰ μέσης τῆς πόλεως παρελθεῖν. ναὶ μὴν ἐξάπινα συρραγέντες τοῖς περὶ τὸ θέατρον στασιώταις τοῦ Ἰωάννου αὐτούς τε ῥαδίως διασκεδάζουσι καὶ κατὰ ῥαστώνην πᾶσαν τῷ Ἰωάννῃ προσβάλλουσι, κτείνουσί τε ὡς βόσκημα πανσώμους ἐπενεγκόντες πληγὰς, καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀφελόμενοι τῷ βασιλεῖ προσάγουσι. καὶ ἡ μὲν τῇ κατὰ τὴν ἀγορὰν ἀψίδι μετεωρίζεται πρὸς θεὸν πάνδημον, ἔτι τοῦ αἵματος ἀποβλύζουσα σέσηρυῖα τε δεινὸν καὶ μεμυκυῖα τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ· ὁ δὲ λοιπὸς Ἰωάννης ἀρθεὶς ἐπὶ κλίνης αἴθριος προτίθεται κατὰ τὴν μεσημβρινὴν πύλην τῶν ἐν Βλαχέρναις ἀρχείων.

⁶⁷⁸ On the meaning of the verb σαίρω see *Suda* σ 262, 263

⁶⁷⁹ II *Kings* 25:8–11, *Jeremiah* 52:30.

⁶⁸⁰ Nicholas Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* §28 46.21–31.

employed by the four authors. All of them underscore John's grotesque fatness by revolving around the idea of swelling, inflation and puffing up. Thus, Chrysoberges presents John's body as if it was merely a puffed-up bulk of flesh and meat in at least two instances: once, his body is 'transformed' into an inflated cedar of Lebanon (Λιβάνου κέδρος), which was cut down by the tree-cutting hands of the emperor Alexios.⁶⁸¹ Further on, Chrysoberges paints a similar picture of John fatness (κατάσωμος), which was inflated and swollen by his tyrannical urge (φιλαρχία ἔρως).

Kazdan perceives these images used by Chrysoberges merely as a means of de-concretization and underscoring the "identity of certain essential qualities," thus John's corpulence.⁶⁸² This is partly true: the idea of swelling and puffing up does bring John's fatness to the fore, but at the same time it points to the grotesque unnaturalness of the usurper. This swollen monster, an inflated sack of meat had to be destroyed, or a bubble which was inflated with bitterness and distress.⁶⁸³ It negated the natural order of the world: being simultaneously inflated with air, hence light, and swollen with meat, thus immensely heavy (κατάσωμος, παχύς), it could not exist and was doomed to fall.⁶⁸⁴ For this reason, Chrysoberges likens John to an animal with a specious name 'day-fly,' which was supposed to live on the banks of the river Hypanis and which lived for one day only.⁶⁸⁵ Hence, the image of the inflated sack of flash does not seem to be, as Kazdan put it, a deliberately obscured abstraction or a mere rhetorical amplification. Contrary to that, it is very concrete and up to a point, since it evokes a set of vivid images. This quality become clearer if we turn back to the image of the inflated cedar of Lebanon. It does not simply objectify John and his corpulent body and is not merely used by Chrysoberges to 'de-concretize' the entire occurrence.⁶⁸⁶

Similar objectification and animalization is present in the speech by Tornikes, who builds the grotesque imagery also around the mutually contradictory ideas of being puffed up with the air and filled with heavy flesh, at the same, infusing John's body with air points to the shortness of his usurpation:

At once, with inflated flesh and mind, swelled to a great size assumed the burden of kingship and possessing a fleshy mind, he assumed the burden of kingship and at once he blew away his life like a wineskin filled with air.⁶⁸⁷

The paradoxical fleshy and airy nature of John indicates not only his grotesque monstrosity, but also points to his complete stupidity and non-entity: apart from his meaty body and fleshy mind he was a puffed up 'balloon' which needed to be blown away by the emperor. Just like Chrysoberges, Tornikes takes this unnaturalness as a prosaic explanation of why John was killed: he was simply bound to fall and die due to the very nature of his bodily constitution. Addressing the already dead monster, Tornikes states ironically:

O, you of feeblest and tiniest mind, and of body heavy with flesh and meat: did you not know that all earthly objects which are the heaviest ones fall at the fastest speed? ... For God knew, parodising you like Moses in order to cast the

⁶⁸¹ Chrysoberges, *Speech I* 5.1–5.

⁶⁸² KAZDAN–FRANKLIN, *Studies* 244.

⁶⁸³ Chrysoberges, *Speech I* 9.25–27.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. 8.29–34: ἴσως καὶ ὡς τὰ ἐν μετεώροις παραφαντάσματα καὶ ἀνυπόστατα ὑποστήματα, πλινθίδες ταῦτα δηλαδὴ καὶ διάττοντες, ἃ συνιστᾷ μὲν παχεῖά τις καὶ ἀτμιταῦτα δηλαδὴ καὶ διάττοντες, ἃ συνιστᾷ μὲν παχεῖά τις καὶ ἀτμιδώδης ἀναθυμίασις, ἐξάπτει δὲ μετεωρισμὸς καὶ κίνησις ἄτακτος, καὶ φάνσεως μὲν πλάνην ἐμποιοῦσιν ἐπὶ βραχύ, αὐτίκα μέντοι λύονται τε καὶ οἴχονται

⁶⁸⁵ Chrysoberges, *Speech I* 9.34; Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 5.43.

⁶⁸⁶ For the Biblical story related to the cedar of Lebanon see II *Kings* 14:9.

⁶⁸⁷ Tornikes, *Speech I* §14 68.2–4.

appropriate verdict on yourself, that you were surrounded by bodies and he apportioned a sorry end for you and said: *come now, let us kill him* (Genesis 37:20).⁶⁸⁸

At the same time, Tornikes goes a step further and elaborates at length on John's beastly and monstrous features. At times, he transfigures John's body into that of an ox or a donkey. We have already seen such an imagery, linked with βοῦς in several texts, from Psellos' invectives to Choniates' 'iambic' sketches in his *History*. Certainly, Tornikes operates here with the iambic aesthetics which always reconfigure human body and show it in challenged degrading forms and poses. Evoking an ox plays on numerous interconnected threads of meaning. For one, just as was the case with the monk Jacob in Psellos' invective or, or John Kamateros in Choniates' *History*, the epithet serves to degrade its object as a boorish, moronic and uneducated individual. The Biblical quotation which Tornikes uses while referring to beastly features of John's body adds another layer of meanings hidden behind the epithet. The sentence in *Isaiah* states that even the oxen and the ass (though the least intelligent animals) know who their master is, but Israel cannot recognize it.⁶⁸⁹ The overtone of Tornikes' words is clear: John is even less intelligent than these animals, completely unable to recognize who his rightful master should be (i.e. the emperor), and he simply had to be killed.

Additionally, it allows Tornikes to emphasize grotesque monstrosity of John's body. The image of an ox seems to be closely connected to the notion of the Empedoclean monsters, to which he is compared in the earlier section of the speech and which, as I have discussed above, comprised of the separate limbs, which roamed the world in its primeval state, multi-faced countenances, figures of half-ox half-man et cetera. John, it seems, presents not one, but all sorts of Empedoclean monsters: he is not only a headless neck and a neckless head, but also a body of an ox (βοῦς τὸ σῶμα) with a wondrous head (or forehead) of an ox (τερατολογούμενον βούπρωρον).⁶⁹⁰ Otherwise, he looks like an ass and is even more stupid and senseless than it (ἀγνωμονέστερος ... ἀναισθητότερος).⁶⁹¹

Finally, the term βούπρωρος is also linked with the idea of a sacrificial victim, which was slaughtered as a votive offering to the gods.⁶⁹² Without a doubt, Tornikes presents John in a mold of a sacrificial beast. Describing the enormous decapitated bulk, which laid lifeless on the ground, he writes:

One could say, observing the corpse, that he was an ox, which they puff up by [the prick of] a mattock, and then they slaughter it; a pitiful sight, a corpse difficult [to look at], which averted the civilized eyes, and which was kicked by some people, while pitied by others.⁶⁹³

Darrouzés remarked that the picture of pricking a corpse with a mattock refers, to a procedure of the slaughter-masters, which included pricking the skin of an animal prior to its skinning, in

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid. § 14 70.4–12.

⁶⁸⁹ *Isaiah* 1:3: "The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

⁶⁹⁰ The term βούπρωρος was associated with Empedoclean cosmology, as is attested by Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* IX.381.7–8: ὅτι καὶ τὰ παρὰ τῷ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ "βουγενῇ ἀνδρόπρωρα" ἢ "ἀνδρογενῇ βούπρωρα."

⁶⁹¹ Tornikes, *Speech I* § 18 7016–21.

⁶⁹² For this see *LSJ*.

⁶⁹³ Tornikes, *Speech I*: § 15 68.23–69.3: Εἶπεν ἄν τις, ἐπισκώπτων τῷ πτώματι, βοῦν εἶναι τοῦτον, οἷον οἱ ἐκ μακέλλης φουσῶσιν, ἐπὶ αὐτὸν ἀποκτείνωσιν, ἐλεεινὸν θέαμα, πτώμα παγγάλεπον, ἡμέροι ὀφθαλμοῖς ἀποτρόπαιον, παρὰ μὲν τῶν λὰξ παιόμενον τε καὶ ὑβριζόμενον, παρὰ δὲ τῶν οἰκτιζόμενον.

order to get rid of any air which cumulated underneath its skin.⁶⁹⁴ The action of ‘blowing out’ John’s body neatly rounds the theme of John in the guise of a puffed-up σῶμα: this artificial balloon of a man, swollen with evil and love of tyranny was finally deflated. Simultaneously, Tornikes might have had another image in his own mind while using the noun μακέλλα. It becomes intelligible if we take a recourse to the entry in *Suda* which glosses over it:

Makella: a double-pronged fork. And Aristophanes [writes]: “O fool, o fool! Don’t provoke the wrath of the gods like a coward, so that justice shall not eradicate the entire race of yours with Zeus’ mattock.” This is said with reference to the blasphemers.⁶⁹⁵

Hence, on top of pointing to John’s boorishness and an ox-like body, the μακέλλα introduces a clear ethical overtone to the entire image and suggests that the usurper was a blasphemer who was destroyed by the divine wrath.⁶⁹⁶

Similar motifs appear in the accounts by Mesarites and Choniates. Mesarites, for instance, alludes to the concept of John as a sacrificial victim in several sentences dispersed throughout his λόγος ἀφηγηματικός. Thus, he labels John in Biblical terms as a “son of perdition” who has been singled out for slaughter and death,⁶⁹⁷ he is dragged by his supporters as if to the kingdom of Pluto and carried in a basket through the Acheronian sea,⁶⁹⁸ just like a sacrificial beast. Finally, during the defilement of his body after his gory execution, he appears to be prepared by the imperial guards like an offering to the gods of the underworld.⁶⁹⁹

Choniates’ imagery is even more closely related to that of Tornikes. In the passage from the *History* which concludes the narrative of the coup, John is slaughtered by the troops sent by the emperor Alexios III in the manner of a sacrificial (hence also fatted) beast (ὡς βόσκημα). Once the enormous decapitated body has been placed upon a bed and left in the open, the emperor decides to have a triumphant look over the dead remnant of his monstrous enemy:

The emperor, having scaled up to the terraces above the gate, looked down, staring from this very place at the corpse which was larger than a gigantically swollen bull; he stood there celebrating in good mood and bragging about his success. Then the body was dragged away, and it served as food for birds and dogs, which was deemed savage and inhuman by everyone.⁷⁰⁰

It is seemingly hard to ignore the apparent similarities between the scene presented in Choniates and Tornikes: they both mention the ‘inhumane’ treatment of the ox-like body, both refer to throwing the corpse to be prey of birds and dogs and both treat John as a sacrificial victim. Choniates, however, uses the ox-related imagery to mock John’s monstrous

⁶⁹⁴ DARROUZÉS, “Les discours” 68 n. 18.

⁶⁹⁵ *Suda* μ 67: Μάκελλα: δίκελλα. Ἀριστοφάνης: ὦ μῶρε, μῶρε, μὴ θεῶν κίνει φρένας δειλίας, ὅπως μὴ σου γένος πανώλεθρον Διὸς μακέλλῃ πᾶν ἀναστρέψῃ δίκη. ἐπὶ τῶν βλασφημῶν εἴρηται. Cf. *Suda* μ 1338. The quotation is taken from Aristophanes, *Birds* 1238–40.

⁶⁹⁶ Cf. the use of Choniates’ quotation from Plutus in the prologue to his *History* which I have discussed in the previous chapter.

⁶⁹⁷ Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* § 6 23.6–7: τὸν ὑπὸ τῶν τῆς ἀπωλείας υἱῶν εἰς σφαγὴν προδιδόμενον καὶ εἰς θάνατον. Cf. *John* 17:12 ... καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀπώλετο εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, ἵνα ἡ γραφὴ πληρωθῇ. The Biblical notion of the son of perdition is employed with reference to apostates and other ungodly types.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.* § 8 25.10 and 25.17–18.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.* § 28 46.26–32.

⁷⁰⁰ Niketas Choniates, *History* 528.73–78: Καὶ βασιλεὺς τὰς ἄνωθεν αὐτῆς ἀρχικὰς διαίτας εἰσανιὼν ἐθεᾶτο κάτωθεν, ὁμοῦ μὲν τὰς ὄψεις διδοὺς τῷ πτώματι ὑπὲρ βοῦν διωδηκότη μεγαλόπλευρον, ὁμοῦ δὲ καὶ διαχεόμενος τῷ ὀράματι καὶ καταλαζονεόμενος τὸ κατόρθωμα. μετὰ δὲ τὸ σῶμα ἐκεῖθεν ἀρθέν κυσὶ καὶ ὄρνισι βορὰ παρατίθεται, ὃ καὶ θηριῶδες μικροῦ καὶ ἀπάνθρωπον τοῖς ἄπασιν ἔδοξεν.

fatness for the very last time. The monstrous corpse of the usurper was so enormous that the emperor had to scale up to the gallery of the palace in order to see its entirety and admire his victim. The fat monster was finally put to death.

5.8. *The Meat of the Texts: The Function of the Iambic and the Grotesque*

I have been arguing so far that the presentation of John Komnenos the Fat in the four accounts of his failed coup can be understood as deeply embedded in the iambic and grotesque tradition. I have been attempting to show that the iambic/grotesque body stands at the very core of the aesthetics explored by Chrysoberges, Tornikes, Choniates and Mesarites. I have shown how John's morbid fatness facilitated the use of the literary techniques characteristic of the comic discourse, how the texts explore the symbolic significance of fatness, which was embedded in the Greek comic tradition and how it is further endowed with typically Christian overtones of sinfulness and evil. The iambic and the grotesque features revealed themselves in the overtly crude imagery, the sickly leaking body, the dismembered corpus, the transmogrified unnatural σῶμα of the usurper, which seemed impossible to exist. At times, presented as an enormous bulk of flesh, at other as a gigantic inflated wineskin, or a dismembered Empedoclean monster, whose joints seemed not to be attached to each other.

I have also attempted to underline how the use of iambic discourse differs from its application by Psellos in the invectives against Jacob and Sabbaites, in the *Timarion* or in Choniates' *History*. The yapping mouth, the focus of iambic insult, is virtually absent in all texts in question and, such a discursive modification happened for a very good reason. The authors of all the accounts revolve, at lesser or greater length, around John's decapitation and his complete passivity: in Mesarites' narrative his head seems to be barely attached to the rest of the body, it is faceless and speechless. In Tornikes' speech, John's head is merely another frightful Empedoclean monster and a mute *gorgoneion*, which spiteful to look at. In the episode from Choniates' *History*, just as in the other accounts, we can see his face and his grinning mouth only after John's death. It thus becomes fully explainable why the mouth does not play any role as a dominant metonymy and why the focus shifts to John's gargantuan body and his monstrous head. Hence, I have been arguing that the focus of the iambic discourse leans towards its other characteristic feature, namely, the grotesque style, with hyperbole, excess and exaggeration beyond all possible proportions as its core features.

Following Worman, I have noted that the primary function of the iambic discourse in Byzantine literature was to label and expose those sets of behaviors which are socially unacceptable, which threaten social stability, or even endanger the well-being of the state. Two questions remain to be answered at this point: what symbolic significance does the use of the grotesque convey within the four texts which deal with the coup of John the fat and what its end function is in each account?

Analyzing the use of the grotesque body in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Bakhtin noticed its essentially subversive nature. Perceived from this vantage point, the grotesque body epitomizes the world that has been turned upside down: within the scheme of the grotesque, the traditional boundaries and values are transgressed, the norms are suspended, nothing is finished and complete. In Bakhtinian framework, the grotesque body is an unconfined and uncompleted entity, which is in the act of becoming or degrading: thence its dismemberment, its presentation in the piecemeal fashion and its openness. The grotesque body sweats excessively, defecates, spurts out blood and urine, eats and drinks extravagantly, it is constantly in the act of becoming and passing. Yet, as Bakhtin showed, there always is a

deeper social meaning which is hidden behind this “boundless ocean of grotesque imagery”: in Rabelais, the grotesque body stands as a figure of contemporary political conflicts which are internalized into it. Its disorderly physiology, its unnatural constitution copies the anarchic dynamics of social and political transformation.⁷⁰¹

Certainly, such a convergence of unruly bodily physiology and the act of turning the social order upside down can be gleaned from all of accounts of John’s coup. At the same time, however, the meaning and the purpose of usage of the monstrous body in each one of them differs, depending on the immediate context of the composition of the text.

Tornikes’ and Chrysoberges’ speeches seem to be closest to each other in terms of the purpose of usage of the iambic and the grotesque elements. Both orations were written as official addresses which were supposed to be delivered in front of a larger audience and the emperor himself. Their end purpose was simple: to praise the emperor as befitted the exultant atmosphere of the occasion, to cast him in the guise of the one who defeated the pure evil and, simultaneously, to entertain the listeners. The monstrous presentation of John, accompanied by the iambic, irreverent tone and comic playfulness, served to underscore the importance of quenching the rebellion by emperor Alexios III. In Tornikes’ speech, the monstrous dismembered body stands as a metonym of the overturning of divine τάξις, the order and the hierarchy of the world. The fat John is presented in the guise of an otherworldly beast, who, surrounded by the throng of fools, dared to sit on the imperial throne in Constantinople. The enormous weight of his body stands as a metonym for his inevitable and imminent collapse: such an abnormal creature was bound to fall by the very law of the natural order. The monstrosity of John, his grinning gorgon’s head and his sickly body maximally distance him from the ideal of imperial body. John’s dismembered ‘Empedoclean’ σῶμα seems to be a diagram of the body politic affected by the rebellion: for a moment, the established hierarchies were shattered. The imperial palace, the heart of the empire, was penetrated by a foolish rabble, which gathered around the morbidly fat monster. Yet, thanks to emperor’s swift actions the body politic was reunited again and its monstrous configuration was eradicated: the state was rejuvenated and the divine τάξις has been restored.

Surely, the unnaturalness of the entire situation, as well as the emperor’s role within the occurrence is further strengthened by intermingling the iambic and monstrous discourse with Biblical imagery, and both Chrysoberges and Tornikes are extremely diligent in associating John with the ungodly patterns of behavior. The latter, for instance, associates John with the character of Jeroboam from I *Kings* 26–40, who rebelled against the House of David, instigated a revolution which split Israel and undermined its greatness and who attempted to introduce the idolatry.⁷⁰² In a similar vein, Tornikes identifies John with the ungodly behavior of the Israelites from *Deuteronomy* 32:15–18. Despite the providence that God spread over them, the Israelites ‘grew fat’ and rejected everything that was godly, they broke the sacred covenant with God by worshiping idols and for this very reason they had to face God’s wrath and vengeance.⁷⁰³ Again, Tornikes recounts the words taken from *Isaiah* 37:27, identifying John’s followers as godless Egyptians.⁷⁰⁴

Going along similar lines, Chrysoberges makes frequent recourse to Biblical quotations and imagery in order to emphasize the role of the emperor, as a divine-inspired

⁷⁰¹ BACHTIN, *Rabelais and His World* 315 ff.

⁷⁰² Tornikes, *Speech I* §12 67.9–11.

⁷⁰³ Ibid. §12 67.5–8.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid. §16 69.6–7.

force, which put the revolt led by the gargantuan monster to its end. Hence, the monstrous puffed-up cedar of Lebanon which was cut down by the hands of Alexios III refers actually to the *Psalm* 37, where the main theme is God's punishment over those who are wicked: they are bound to fall.⁷⁰⁵ In the *Psalm*, moreover, the outgrowth of the cedar tree is used as a symbol of the wicked and the ruthless who were growing in number. Nonetheless, no matter how many of them there would be, God would surely eradicate them.⁷⁰⁶ A similar intention stands behind revoking the sickle of Zechariah,⁷⁰⁷ which punishes the sinner, cuts down his supporters, cuts off his head and slashes him to pieces.⁷⁰⁸ These and other Biblical images combined with the monstrous serve to underscore the battle of good and evil, the natural (godly) and unnatural (monstrous/ungodly), the righteous and the wicked.

In Mesarites', account the function of the monstrous is more complex than in the speeches by Tornikes and Chrysoberges. Certainly, there are many common points between what Mesarites wishes to achieve in his narrative and what Chrysoberges as well as Tornikes aimed at. On the one level of reading, Mesarites does point to the rejuvenation of social order by the hands of the emperor and uses the grotesque/iambic imagery as a diagram of the abnormal social situation. On the other hand, one cannot underplay a deeply personal involvement of Mesarites in the entire affair. After all, the departure point of the entire narrative is the fact that he was an eyewitness of everything that had occurred during that day and night. While his presence in the imperial palace during the revolt added significantly to the vividness of his λόγος ἀφηγηματικός, the very fact that he was there must have risen at least some degree of suspicion. From this vantage point then, Mesarites' account can be read at least to some extent, as an interesting kind of *apologia pro vita sua*, and one of the aims of Mesarites was to distance himself as maximally as possible from any suspicion of being implicated in the coup.

Without a doubt, his personal situation must have been aggravated by the fact that his family, which was no secret at all, was closely connected to the previous tyrannical regime of Andronikos I Komnenos in 1180's. His relative, Theodore and his brother John were openly inimical towards Manuel Komnenos.⁷⁰⁹ It comes as no surprise that in the early 1180's the members of the Mesarites' family allied themselves closely with Andronikos well before he took the imperial scepter in 1183. For the political careers of members of Nicholas' family, the short and bloody tyranny seemed to have been a springboard. It was most probably during this period that Nicholas' father was promoted to the important office of *protasekretis*.⁷¹⁰ In the eulogy addressed at his deceased brother, Nicholas overtly admits that John was an ardent follower of Andronikos.⁷¹¹ As Angold points out, the downfall of Andronikos' tyranny was a

⁷⁰⁵ Chrysoberges, *Speech I* 5.1–2.

⁷⁰⁶ *Psalm* 37:35–38: "I have seen a wicked and ruthless man / flourishing like a luxuriant native tree, / but he soon passed away and was no more; / though I looked for him, he could not be found. / Consider the blameless, observe the upright; / a future awaits those who seek peace. / But all sinners will be destroyed; / there will be no future for the wicked."

⁷⁰⁷ *Zechariah* 5:1–4.

⁷⁰⁸ Chrysoberges, *Speech I* 7.3–8.19. See KAZDAN–FRANKLIN, *Studies* 245.

⁷⁰⁹ ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 5 notes that Manuel dissolved Theodore's marriage with a bride who came from the Bryennios family, while John, most probably plotting to overthrow Manuel, fled to Palestine, where the emperor sent his fleet in order to bring him back to Constantinople.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.* For the *protasekretis* see A. KAZDAN, "Protasekretis" in *ODB* vol. III 1726.

⁷¹¹ Nicholas Mesarites, *Epitaph* 33.9–11: καὶ ὁ βαρὺς ἐκεῖνος καὶ δύσκολος βασιλεὺς, Ἀνδρόνικος δ' οὗτος, ὡς ἔρμαιόν τι τοῦτον ἀναλαμβάνει καὶ ὡς μὴ συληθῆναι παρὰ τινος ἐγκολπίζεται, καὶ ὁ ἐφ' ἅπασιν ἀηδὴς ἐπὶ τοῦμῳ ἀδελφῷ ἡδὺς ἐγνωρίζετο.

terrible disaster for the family: Nicholas' father died a terrible death, having been thrown off a rooftop,⁷¹² while Nicholas' older brother, John, was forced to flee from Constantinople.⁷¹³

Nicholas must have been fully aware that he could have been easily associated with the coup of John Komnenos 'the Fat.' Thus, building his narrative, he took recourse to the grotesque and the iambic with a clear intent to mock the foolish fatso who dared to seat on the imperial throne and to disassociate himself from the followers of the usurper. The deriding tone, the comic air of the account and the grotesque presentation of John were all employed by Nicholas to underscore the inimical stance towards the coup. Mesarites is extremely careful in presenting his role in what occurred during that night: he emphasizes how he took care himself of the holy relics which were stored in the area of the Great Palace.⁷¹⁴ The grotesque monstrosity of the usurper and the introduction of the characteristically crude iambic aesthetics serves Nicholas to exhibit his own perspective on what occurred during that night: the ungodly rabble composed of all sorts of social scum, led by the headless monster of enormous sign attempted to take the imperial in their own hands. The apparent 'lack' of head on John's neck, his morbidly obese stature and sickly constitution functioned as emblems of the fact that the revolt was ungodly and had to be suppressed with the help of divine power.

Finally, it is important to underline that the episode in Niketas Choniates' *History* stands out from all the other accounts. Unlike Mesarites' narrative, and dissimilar to the speeches by Chrysoberges and Tornikes, it is not a self-enclosed entity. It is composed only of four succinct passages which are incorporated into an extended historiographical narrative. Certainly, Niketas' account is very much in line with the iambic/grotesque aesthetics present in the other texts in question. On a surface-level reading one could discern the grotesque theme of degradation of the order and its subsequent revival. If we look at the bigger picture and contextualize it against the motifs I have been analyzing in the previous chapter, the meaning of the iambic and the monstrous gains a completely different meaning. I have shown how Choniates, as the only author, shows the emperor Alexios III as he cheers jubilantly, looking at the monstrous decapitated corpus of John as it lays exposed in the Blachernai Palace.

Yet, one cannot escape the impression that Choniates is extremely sarcastic in such a depiction of Alexios III. Surely, his attitude towards the Angeloi emperors was straightforwardly negative. Choniates perceived the fall of the Komnenoi dynasty as the last nail in the coffin of the Byzantine Empire. The bloody reign of Andronikos was, at least Niketas' eyes, pivotal since it was the last attempt to curb the anarchic tendencies of the highest classes. With the rise of the Angeloi, the Byzantine body politic was rapidly degenerating. The onset of cruel tyranny of Andronikos is portended by a monstrous birth which was delivered by some woman in Propontis: purportedly she conceived a child with a very small head and an overgrown body, which was read as a sign of the looming polyarchy.⁷¹⁵ Surely, the monstrous degeneration of the imperial body politic commenced well into the reign of Andronikos. Commenting on the bloody excesses of Andronikos, Choniates states explicitly that the head of the state was in pain due to the atrocities perpetrated by the tyrant and that they all

⁷¹² Ibid. §5 20.6–9: καὶ θάνατος ἡμετέρου πατρὸς καὶ βίαιος υἱοῦ αὐτῆς ἀποβίωσις καταρραγέντος ἀφ' ὑψηλοῦ καὶ θρυβέντος τὴν ὀλομέλειαν, τὸ μέγιστον τῆς πατρικῆς ἡμῶν οἰκίας δυσκλήρημα.

⁷¹³ ANGOLD, *Nicholas Mesarites* 6.

⁷¹⁴ Nicholas Mesarites, *Narrative of the Coup* § 11–13; Nicholas relates his active engagement in defending the Holy Relics are accounted in §15–23.

⁷¹⁵ Niketas Choniates, *History* 225.51–55.

resembled the terrifying 'Empedoclean monsters.'⁷¹⁶ Even well before this passage, Choniates compares the state of the empire to the 'belly of the whore' into which all the taxes flew, which was the result of the lavish expenditure of *protosebastos* Alexios.⁷¹⁷

The bloody tyranny of Andronikos I Komnenos was, in Choniates' eyes, the last failed attempt at curbing the greedy and dissenting aristocratic classes, and with the rise of the Angeloi dynasty, the situation only worsened. When Alexios III Angelos hatched a conspiracy in order to depose his brother Isaakios and had him blinded, Choniates illustrates the situation of the empire in a picture of a body whose limbs fight against each other: the natural order of things was subverted and replaced by its monstrous modification which could not function properly.⁷¹⁸ That said, in Choniates' *History* the grotesque body of John seems to be and exemplification of the implorable situation of the Empire: its monstrous body politic, terminally sick, degenerated and unable to be healed was finally doomed to fall.⁷¹⁹

Hence, dissimilar to other accounts, the rejuvenation which seems to come after the eradication of the monstrous John is only superficial in Choniates' narrative, and it can be already gleaned from the above-mentioned scene, in which Alexios foolishly celebrates the death of the usurper. The swift suppression of the coup did not contribute in any significant way to the rejuvenation. Within less than four years of the failed coup, the Latins took possession of Constantinople and the degenerated imperial body was unable to fight them off.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid. 259.24–36

⁷¹⁷ Ibid. 230.4–9: ἦγεν οὖν, ὡς ἡρεῖτο, πάντα καὶ μετεπέττευε, καὶ ἅπερ οἱ ἐκ Κομνηνῶν πρότερον βασιλεῖς ἰδρῶσι πολλοῖς, εἶπω δὲ καὶ τοὺς πένητας καλαμῶμενοι, συλλογιμαίως ἀπεθησαύρισαν χρήματα, ταῦτα τῷ πρωτοσεβαστῷ καὶ τῇ βασιλίσει πρὸς ἀποχέτευσιν προύκειντο· καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἀρχιλόχου ἄντικρυς ἐπεραίνετο, ὃ φησιν, εἰς ἔντερον πόρνης πολλάκις μεταρρυῖσκεσθαι τὰ χρόνῳ καὶ πόνῳ συλλεγένητα μακρῷ.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid. 453.1–5.

⁷¹⁹ Cf. Corinne Jouanno's discussion of the degenerating body politic in Psellos' *Chronographia*: C. JOUANNO, "Le corps du prince dans la 'Chronographie' de Michel Psellos." *Kentron* 19 (2003) 205–221.

6. FOREWORD

It has been often pointed out that the production of drama during the Byzantine millennium was scarce. Surely, there is no doubt about it. With the exceptions of the anonymous *Christos Paschon*, the *Katomyomachia* by Theodore Prodromos, the short *Dramation* of Michael Haploucheiros, the late Byzantine *Comedy of Katablattas* along with several other texts, there has not survived any other literary texts from the Byzantine millennium which could be grouped under the label of 'drama.'⁷²⁰ Yet, the scarcity in production was not correlated with the lack of interest in such texts. Quite the contrary, the rich tradition of ancient Greek drama, be it tragedy and comedy was a pillar of Byzantine educational system as well as literary culture. Collected in triads, the tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles as well as the selection of the comedies of Aristophanes formed the core of Byzantine *curriculum studiorum* and the foundation upon which the Byzantine pupils were taught the ropes of Attic diction.

I have been arguing throughout this thesis that such a presence of Aristophanic comedies in the Byzantine school *curricula* had far-fetched consequences, some of which have been previously only preliminarily touched upon. Indeed, the omnipresence of Aristophanic tradition, be it in the form of proverbs derived from his comedies, a myriad of references to Aristophanic plays in the Byzantine *lexika* and the fact that Aristophanes' comedies were constantly read in the Byzantine schools exerted enormous influence on Byzantine literary culture. The coarse Aristophanic humour, the crude aesthetics, and the culture of mocking as a means of moral persuasion became deeply inculcated in the minds of many of Byzantine authors throughout the millennium of the existence of the empire.

As I have contended at the very beginning of this thesis, these facts are of utmost importance to understanding the enormously rich literary culture of the 'long twelfth century,' and to the question of the reception of Aristophanic material within its milieu. The eleventh century brought about important economic and political changes which began to reshape the Byzantine social and cultural environment. People began to be richer and more of them could afford to send their children to school. Simultaneously with the enrichment of the populace, there occurred major developments in the material culture: the everyday diet of the Byzantines was changing and the dining habits were becoming richer and the interest in the matters of human body was increasing. Gradually, the educated Byzantine elites of the of the long twelfth century became almost obsessed with the preparation and consumption of food and drink and the unprecedented spread of this obsession is certainly peculiar to this period.

Anthony Kaldellis argued at length that the Byzantine literati of the twelfth century took keener interest in the works of ancient Greek literature where they sought for the suitable means of expression of the altering social habits. It does not come as any surprise then that the authors who lived in the society which was obsessed with food and drink took often recourse to the comedies of Aristophanes and the ancient Greek comic tradition. They appropriated its language and aesthetics, re-used and even abused its themes and motifs. This led to what I have labelled as an 'Aristophanic boom' in the long twelfth century.

Following the analysis of Nancy Worman, I have been attempting to argue that this appropriation might be elucidated through the lenses of what she termed as 'iambic discourse.' It was a discourse which originated in the archaic Greek poetry and vastly influenced Athenian Old Comedy, and, in the later period, dispersed throughout different literary genres. Its main characteristics consist of insulting and irreverent tone which is

⁷²⁰ For the Comedy of Katablattas as a Byzantine variation of the Old Comedy see P. MARCINIAK, "Ancient Comedy in Byzantine Satire," *Scripta Classica* 1 (2004) 67–93.

focused on the most basic needs of human body (the appetites for food, drink and sex), the extremely crude aesthetics which revolve around all sorts of bodily reactions, the binary opposition of female (uncontrolled) versus male (controlled), and the metonymic usage of bodily orifices, with the mouth being the most important one among those, since iambos originated in the festive setting of ancient Greek symposia. As Worman noticed, the iambic discourse is the most important mechanism of Greek comedy.

I have argued throughout this thesis that the application of Worman's methodology might shed additional light not only on the reception of the widely understood ancient Greek comic tradition, but also might elucidate important covert meanings of many texts produced within the period of the long twelfth century. As I have attempted to show, the concept of iambic discourse might be applied to the literary works from the period in question due to the fact that the interest in the Aristophanes' comedies was booming and that the literary culture in the second half of the eleventh century as well as in the twelfth century was chiefly performative. My overarching intention throughout the argument was to understand how the crude language of iambos was used and appropriated by the Byzantine authors in order to reflect their contemporary social reality and concerns.

Thus, we have seen how Psellos appropriated in *In Iacobum* the irreverent iambic tone with its focus on crude physicality in the genre of a solemn religious hymn. He consciously welded two seemingly incompatible literary traditions into one and voiced the iambically irreverent tone by re-using and abusing quotations from the Old and New Testament. He also employed terms derived mainly from the Biblical literature in order to convey physical 'iambic' reactions of Jacob's body to the excess of wine. These were used not only to mock the drunken monk, but to exhibit Psellos' literary skill and prove his superiority in the performative λογικὸς ἄγων characteristic of the second half of the eleventh century.

With the *Timarion* I have shown a complementary, but slightly diverging usage of the iambic discourse. As I have argued, the social reality changed drastically at the moment when the anonymous satire was composed, and the iambic elements present in it expose and mock the excesses of the culture within which it was produced. In the *Timarion* we encounter insatiable iambic speechifiers, who are always hungry for empty words and unclean food. Using the overtly iambic aesthetics and appropriating the vast ancient Greek comic material, the anonymous author of the play criticizes his cultural milieu as a space which favors sophistry and disdains the truth.

The employment of the iambic mechanics in Choniates' *History* played even deeper social and political function. As I have argued, the incorporation of the comic material in the historical discourse played an important corrective role in Choniates' work. I have been attempting to elucidate that Niketas consciously appropriated many prominent motifs derived from Aristophanic comedies in order to laugh down and expose all the factors which led to the collapse of the Byzantine polity in 1204: gluttony, prodigal lifestyle, prioritizing one's bodily needs over the affairs of the state, manipulative speechifying; all of which contributed to the dissolution of the state. For these reasons Choniates fashions the imperial officials and emperors themselves in the guises of iambic/comic gluttons who led the state to the brink of destruction.

Last but not least, discussing the four literary accounts of the coup of John Komnenos the Fat, I have been trying to elucidate those aspects of them which have been so far left out or dealt with only in cursory manner. In my analysis, I have pointed at numerous iambic/monstrous elements which are present in it and I have elucidated how deeply they are inculcated in the iambic aesthetics. Again, my purpose was to show that the authors of the

accounts of the coup consciously engaged with the ancient comic/iambic tradition and appropriated many of its standard motifs (iambic physicality, the irreverent and insulting tone, boorishness and fatness), and at the same time welded them with Biblical overtones which were used to underscore the pure evil of the usurper.

All the instances of the appropriation of the iambic discourse in the Byzantine literature of the long twelfth century attest not only to the widespread interest in the Aristophanic material, but, perhaps even more importantly, to the lively engagement with the ancient iambic/comic tradition, which was appropriated across various genres. We have seen how the comic material with the concomitant crude iambic aesthetics were incorporated in both traditional ancient genres of high-style history, official oratory, satirical dialogue or iambic poetry, as well as in a genre specific to Byzantine literature, hence a religious canon. Without any doubt, these attest to the highly innovative and creative ways in which the Byzantines approached and used ancient Greek literature. The end product of these endeavors, as I hope to have shown throughout this thesis, are literary highly creative literary texts which show substantial degree of experimentation with the genre and the form.

In addition, throughout the thesis I have been attempting to show how important it is to read the literary representation of food and its consumption or the human body against their cultural, social and literary contexts. Reading from such a perspective might allow us to elucidate many important aspects of the texts which have been looked over so far and which might alter, at least to some degree, our understanding of their message. I can only hope that this thesis will be at least a minor contribution to this discussion.

7. Summaries

This thesis presents an analysis of the discourses of food and consumption used by the Byzantine authors of the period from the second half of the eleventh century to the beginning of the thirteenth century. The author of the present thesis employs the notion of 'iambic discourse' carved by Nancy Worman in *Abusive Mouths in the Classical Athens*, and analyses how various authors of the period in question used the consumption of food and the human body in their invectives, satires or as means of social critique in the historical discourse. The introduction presents an overview of 'food studies' in Byzantium, offers an analysis of the social changes that led to an unprecedented rise of interest in the comedies of Aristophanes and outlines the methodological framework which is used throughout the thesis. In the first chapter, the author discusses two invectives composed by Michael Psellos (*In Sabbaitam* and *In Iacobum*) and analyses the usage of iambic language as well as iambic aesthetics within them, in order to understand how the insulting language of ancient *iambos* was appropriated in Byzantium. The Appendix contains a first English translation of *In Iacobum*. The second chapter analyses how the iambic insult and its bodily aesthetics were employed in the anonymous twelfth-century satire, the *Timarion*. The first part of this chapter discusses the discourse which equated the production of literature to the art cooking. The second part analyses the use and function of iambic aesthetics in the satire and it is argued that the *Timarion* should be read as a contestation of the cultural arrangement under the Komnenian clan and the iambic elements underscore the potency of the literary attack on the Komnenian society. The third chapter includes an analysis of comic and iambic elements which are present in Niketas Choniates' *History*. It is argued that Choniates consciously incorporated iambic mechanics in the discourse of the *History* in the form of numerous allusions to the ancient comic material. The analysis presented in this chapter is based on various portrayals of gluttonous officials as well as the literary portrait of the tyrant Andronikos I Komnenos, who are presented through motifs and terms taken from Aristophanic comedies. The final chapter of the thesis focuses on the four literary accounts of the failed coup of John Komnenos 'the Fat' and discusses their comic/iambic, rich quotations/allusions to the ancient comic tradition, as well as the function of the iambic/grotesque fat body within them.

Niniejsza praca doktorska przedstawia analizę literackich dyskursów jedzenia oraz jego konsumpcji, używanych przez bizantyńskich autorów w okresie od połowy wieku jedenastego do początków wieku trzynastego. Za pomocą pojęcia 'dyskursu jambicznego', które zaproponowane zostało przez Nancy Worman w jej pracy *Abusive Mouths in the Classical Athens* autor powyższej rozprawy analizuje w jaki sposób konsumpcja jedzenia oraz ludzkie ciało używane były w wielu tekstach bizantyńskich, we wspomnianym okresie, jako środek wyrazu dla inwektywy, satyry, bądź też społecznej krytyki. We Wstępie prezentowany jest ogólny ogląd studiów poświęconych kwestii konsumpcji w Bizancjum. Znajduje się tu także omówienie zmian społecznych, które spowodowały niespotykaną dotychczas popularność komedii Arystofanesa. Ostatnia część wstępu poświęcona jest zarysowaniu stosowanej w rozprawie metodologii badawczej. Rozdział pierwszy zawiera analizę dwóch literackich inwektyw napisanych przez Michała Psellosa (*In Sabbaitam*, *In Iacobum*) i ukazuje, w jaki sposób użyto w nich języka oraz estetyki charakterystycznych dla dyskursu jambicznego i w jaki sposób antyczny dyskurs jambiczny został przez Psellosa zmodyfikowany. W apendyksie zawarte jest pierwsze całościowe tłumaczenie *In Iacobum* na język angielski. Rozdział drugi poświęcony jest anonimowemu dwunastowiecznemu dialogowi pt. *Timarion*. Część pierwsza przedstawia dyskusję na temat popularnego w dwunastowiecznym Bizancjum dyskursu, który utożsamiał produkcję literacką ze sztuką gotowania. W części drugiej analizie poddane zostaje użycie w *Timarionie* języka i estetyki charakterystycznych dla starożytnego greckiego dyskursu jambicznego. Autor stawia tezę, że *Timarion* powinien być czytany jako kontestacja środowiska kulturowego, w ramach którego został napisany a elementy 'jambiczne' wzmacniają siłę literackiego ataku na społeczeństwo bizantyńskie pod rządami Komnenów. Rozdział trzeci przedstawia analizę elementów dyskursu jambicznego, obecnych w *Historii* Niketasa Choniatesa. Autor przedstawianej rozprawy postuluje, że Choniates świadomie posługuje się językiem i estetyką charakterystyczną dla dyskursu jambicznego i wielokrotnie odwołuje się do greckiej tradycji komicznej/jambicznej. Prezentowana tu analiza oparta jest na wielu przedstawieniach żarłocznych urzędników cesarskich oraz tyrana Andronika I Komnena, których literackie portrety budowane są w oparciu o motywy i terminy zaczerpniętych z komedii Arystofanesa. W rozdziale ostatnim przedstawiana jest analiza czterech literackich tekstów, dotyczących nieudanego przewrotu pałacowego, dokonanego przez Jana Komnena, zwanego Grubym. Ponownie dyskutowane są liczne motywy komiczne oraz jambiczne w nich zawarte, częste odwołania do starożytnej tradycji komicznej oraz funkcja groteskowego/jambicznego ciała Jana.

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